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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# WOMEN IN CALYPSO: HEARING THE VOICES

by

CAROLE NATHALIE MAISON-BISHOP

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in
International/Intercultural Education

Department of Educational Foundations

Edmonton, Alberta

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **"Women in Calypso: Hearing the Voices"** submitted by Carole Nathalie Maison-Bishop in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International/Intercultural Education.

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Date: April 5, 1994

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my late parents

Nathaniel Maison and Stella Carrington-Maison

who always insisted that any dream is attainable.

**Abstract**

Much of the literature on feminist theory expresses the view that listening to women's voices and learning about women's experiences have been crucial to the reconstruction of our understanding of the world. It has also been noted that women's personal narratives represent, *inter alia*, the impact of gender roles on women's lives and illuminate several aspects of gender relations.

This study supported the view that the spoken word has as much authority as the written, thus the essential truths of the lives of the women could be better explored by listening to their stories. Its main purpose was to explore the lives of women who are singing calypso in the Caribbean, attempting to determine what has motivated them to pursue this occupation and what are some of the obstacles they face as they perform in a genre that is fairly open to free market forces and in a society in which women have made significant achievements in education.

The calypso is part of the oral musical tradition of the Region, and it has an extraordinary versatility that allows it, through the voices of its performers, to be an instrument of celebration, social protest, entertainment, satire and passing on of moral instruction. In the formative years of the calypso, that is, in the early part of the 19th century, women played a central role as performers, but by the end of the century, women had all but disappeared from the genre and it was not until relatively recently that they have reentered in noticeable numbers in an attempt to "reclaim their voices."

This study was conducted in three territories of the Commonwealth Caribbean: Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Calypso singing is a part of the cultural tradition in each of these territories, although it is most entrenched in the last-named territory. The data are provided mainly through the voices of 17 women from these countries who are currently singing calypso or who have been singing until recently. The narrators ranged in age from nine years to 53 years.

The study found that the women who have become singers are motivated by a love for the art form, but they also are cognizant of the fact that calypso singing is now an occupation that has a potential for significant financial remuneration and as a result has attracted many more persons, both men and women.

Women have not been able to regain their former role of centrality and they continue to be outnumbered by men. The study found that not only did gender relations play an important part in the women's experiences in the world of calypso, but that the dynamics of power relations between the women and the men in the genre also impacted on the women and the ways in which they have been able to function both on and off the stage.

The study concludes that the male hegemony that exists in the world of calypso is but an offshoot of the ideology of male dominance, which although it is not officially sanctioned, continues to be a reality in most of the societies of the Caribbean but that the women in the genre are beginning to respond to it in a variety of ways. This includes using their voices and their lyrics in celebration of women and womanhood.

Acknowledgements

It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the assistance of many kind persons without whose intervention this thesis could not have been completed in such timely fashion.

First of all, I thank the women who participated in this study for their co-operation and their willingness to share their experiences with me.

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I also wish to thank the administration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat for granting me special leave of absence to pursue the program.

I am most appreciative of the wonderful support which my family provided. My sons Roderic and Howard and my sister Geraldine were always calling with words of encouragement. I especially thank my daughter Beverley for accepting my absence at a critical point in her life. I would like to give special thanks to my husband Aubrey without whose love, understanding and assistance the entire undertaking would have been in jeopardy and successful completion may have been impossible.

Finally, I thank my colleagues and friends in the Department of Educational Foundations for their encouragement and support, especially John who was my technical consultant, Barb, Jenni and Joan.

**Word Rhythms From the Lives of the Common Woman**

i am no muse
no scholar
no wise one
no poet
i cannot
turn a rhyme
  a metre
  a phrase
i am but one
of tens of millions of
ordinary and common persons
THE COMMON WOMAN
YET NOT COMMON TO ALL
Who see and feel and live
 THE WORLD
through the bare opaque window
and in the midst of
The beating hot Sun
The drowning Rain
The blasting Winds
The unexpected joys
  of Sunshine
or tender Moon
Cooling Breezes
Of the Space inhabited
  by ordinary Common Persons
and in particular
The COMMON WOMAN
And from what I see
and feel and live
Together with others
I try to make
Word Photographs
Word Drawings
WORD PAINTINGS
WORD BEATS
WORD Rhythms
from the lives
of the COMMON WOMAN [1]

---

1. Elean Thomas (1986). **Word Rhythms From the Life of a Woman**. London: Karia Press. pp. 24-25. Reproduced with the kind permission of the author.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Starting the Journey

As a Caribbean woman, I come to this study with the recognition that not only have women in the Caribbean played a significant part in the several dynamic processes which characterize the region's economic and cultural development, but that until recently, this contribution has not been put in its proper perspective. However, as Ellis (1986) points out, the image of the strong, independent and dominant Caribbean woman is a familiar one, but what is less known or understood are the factors that have made her this way and the process by which her society uses them to discriminate against her both overtly and subtly (1986:1).

Most importantly, as a black Caribbean woman, I am the descendant of a woman I never knew, but who in her own way contributed to making me what I am today. Who was she, this ancestor of mine? Wrenched from her native Africa by marauders centuries ago and brought to this region to live "under the shadow of the whip", she had no freedom and like most oppressed people, she was silenced. But did *she* have a secret voice? Historians tell me that she was far from docile and compliant as many would have me believe. Mathurin (1975) reports her as "a hot-tempered vixen" who could use "contemptuous language" when the occasion warranted. What I am certain of is the fact that in her silence there was defiance, that in her songs that she sang as she worked in the fields there was insolence. She is long gone, but I am here and with a voice that is not oppressed, I must constantly try to express my response to the many problems and situations that constantly

challenge my independence. Like her I must draw on my inner strength and resourcefulness to face these challenges.

In addition, as an educator who has worked with adult women in many of the territories of the Commonwealth Caribbean, I am aware of the sterling but often unsung contributions that some of these women have made and are still making to the development of their societies. I have therefore approached this study with the persuasion that whoever or whatever gets researched should not be constrained by race, class or gender but with the concern that Caribbean women must begin to speak for themselves about the activities and concerns of their own lives, thus revealing lives of purpose and significance, while releasing inner resources for knowing and valuing that will enable them to find additional sources of strength to deal with life's challenges.

## The Purpose of the Research

In undertaking this study, my main purpose was to explore the relationship between gender and occupational experiences. It examines the lives of female calypso singers in the Caribbean where within the last three decades, they have begun to participate freely in calypso singing, an activity that is a part of the oral, musical tradition of the Region. It is an activity that has, in this century, been regarded as the preserve of men, although history records the central role played by women when it was in its nascent stage. Women's reentry into this milieu, which during their absence became male-centred and male-identified, has been mediated by several factors, not the least being the social and cultural, but it may be premature to assume that there

is a change in the gendered social arrangements or specific gender ideologies in the society. This study is therefore undertaken against a background of experiences of women which serve to highlight the pervasive nature of those very ideological structures that emphasize the dominance of the male in every echelon of the organization, whether that organization be the state, the home or the workplace. My decision to choose these women came from a personal experience which I had with a female calypso singer in Guyana, or rather a teacher who was also a female calypso singer. As we were discussing pedagogical issues one day, she disclosed the fact that she sometimes sang calypso. She then narrated some of the experiences she had encountered and noted that as a calypso singer, she was treated differently by some of the people she met. As I listened to her story, it occurred to me that there were other women like her who were living lives of purpose and richness, with similar experiences that had not been chronicled. Although this conversation took place before I started my studies at University, her words lingered with me and I determined that one day I would research the lives of women like "my friend". Unfortunately, she was not able to participate in this study, but I thank her for that voice to which I listened long ago.

## The Road to the Research Question

How are these women who are singing calypso relating to, and confronting issues associate with the stereotypical image of their social, economic and sexual roles? It is quite apparent that women calypsonians perform in a milieu in which the male ego is predominant. Moreover, the content of many calypsos sung by men

portray women in a negative light, very often implying a gender ideology in which a woman's identity is believed to be imbedded in her sexuality. Are women attempting to release themselves from this unfortunate attitudinal entrapment and its sexual sequelae and if so, how are they carving their niche in a milieu which because of its historical and cultural unfolding, is androcentric in orientation? Further, what are women's motives for pursuing this profession of singing calypso? Is there an intersection of culturally held notions of sexuality and power and if so, is there a complex interplay between gender, power and music which are conceptualized and realized within the specific context of the calypso? What role, if any, do patriarchal structures in the society play? In an age where women are becoming separated from what some theorists refer to as "phallo-centric discourses", as they withdraw from environments that offer them no place to speak except as voices preordained by men, how are the women who are now singing calypso projecting their voices? Last, but perhaps most importantly, how does gender affect their occupational experiences?

These were some of the issues which kept engaging my mind as I embarked upon the road which would ultimately lead to the culmination of this study. Thus, as the study focuses on the women in this genre, the major research question is "What does it mean to be a female calypso singer?"

## The Significance of the Study

In recent years, in large part as a result of the increased consciousness brought about by the United Nations Decade for Women, and also consequent upon the efforts of women's groups and organizations, women in the Caribbean have been

gaining the strength and vision to speak out about what is really important in their lives. Accordingly, more research about the lives of Caribbean women is being conducted.[1] However, women in calypso have not had the benefit of extensive social science research which reflects the realities of their lives. It follows therefore, that we know very little about these women and their experiences as singers in this traditionally male-centred and male-dominated activity.

The women in this study are of varying ages and have been singing calypso for different lengths of time. They all travelled different roads to arrive at their common destination: the world of the female calypso singer. Some of the routes were arduous, even hazardous, some less so; some of the experiences were painful and some were exhilarating, many a mixture of each, but each of those experiences was mediated by the particular reality of the traveller and her understanding of the world around her. These are the voices of women who, although they "speak" on the entertainment stage, are not often heard on the social stage and the legitimacy of their discourse has not been readily acknowledged.

The significance of this study lies in its thrust to present the female calypsonian as someone who through her lyrics and style is making explicit and overt assertions of female strength and autonomy, and who projects what Lorde (1984) describes as "uses of the erotic: the erotic as power". It also permits these women to talk directly about their lives and their experiences, in their own voices, thus allowing

them not only to develop and express a consciousness of gender but at the same time enabling them to verbalize their conception of social reality, regardless of whether it challenges a hegemonic world view of gendered arrangements in the society. It also portrays the difficulties which women face in their struggle for occupational equality in a field that is fairly open to free market forces and in a society in which women have made significant achievements in education.

## The Methodology

It is generally accepted that there are two different, but equally legitimate approaches to inquiry: the quantitative and qualitative. The former is based on a positivist philosophy which assumes that there are social facts with an objective reality apart from the belief of individuals, while the latter is rooted in a phenomenological paradigm which holds that "reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation" (Taylor & Bogdan 1984).

Not surprisingly, feminist scholars have not been averse to voicing their opinions that the positivist philosophy is inappropriate for addressing research relating to women. Mies claims that it is the insistence of women on speaking from their experience and for themselves which has been instrumental in the formulation of a feminist critique of social scientific method, and feminist social science has been one of the major critical approaches eroding positivist claims to social scientific knowledge (Mies 1983).

Bearing these arguments in mind, I decided upon a qualitative approach, recognizing that the interactive experiences of Caribbean women and the everchanging dynamics of their lives might best be captured by this methodology. I was also committed to the view that the spoken word has as much authority as the written and I was persuaded that by listening to the stories of the women, I could learn how they explore the essential truths of the lives of the women and reconstruct their environment for as the Personal Narratives Group insists "since feminist theory is grounded in women's lives and aims to analyze the role and meaning of gender in those lives and society, women's personal narratives are essential primary documents for feminist research" (1990:4). I have therefore used the narratives of the women and have listened to the polyphony of the voices to come to an understanding of what it means to be a female calypso singer. I discuss the process and method more fully in Chapter 1V.

The data used in this study were collected from field research during which in-depth personal interviews were conducted with 17 female calypsonians, four from Guyana, five from Barbados and eight from Trinidad and Tobago. I did not rely on a structured interview format, but approached the respondents with a general set of questions, the answers to which sensitized me to the topic and suggested further questions. The questions are listed in Appendix 1. I also utilized documentary sources, including (a) newspaper and magazine articles; (b) reference material on the calypso and calypsonians, located in the West Indiana Reference section of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. In addition, in a further process

of "informing the researcher" I met and spoke with persons involved in research on the calypso, and the Director of the Caribbean Intercultural Music Institute, which is an institution that conducts research on indigenous music forms in the Caribbean.

## Organization of the Study

The dissertation is organized into eight major chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: "Introduction" presents the issues that led to the identification of the research question. It outlines the purpose and significance of the study and the methodological approach. The organization of the thesis is also presented.

Chapter 11: "Inequalities of Gender" explores the issues related to women's disadvantaged position in society and some of the problems which they face at the international level and in the Caribbean.

Chapter 111: "Breaking the Silences" looks at some of the theories which have been articulated to account for women's silences and in particular, the ways in which women perceive "male authority" and "malestream thought" as contributory factors to this phenomenon.

Chapter 1V: "The Investigation: Process and Method" articulates a rationale for selecting the methodology used in the study. It then takes the reader through the steps and strategies employed for collecting and interpreting the data.

Chapter V: "The Setting" provides information on the Caribbean region highlighting the historical and social, economic and cultural background against which the study was conducted. This chapter also presents the reader with a feel of the

research sites by presenting them in profile, stressing their physical features, history, and social and economic development.

Chapter V1: "Music, Performance and Voice" contextualizes the narratives of the women by positioning the calypso in the musical and social tradition of the Caribbean. It also reviews the literature on the calypso as it explores the woman's role and place in the medium.

Chapter V11: "Hearing the Voices" focuses on the women in calypso and their stories, giving centre stage to the personal narratives of the women as they recount their lives and experiences in the genre.

Chapter V111: "Learning from the Voices" looks at the conclusions and observations which one can draw from hearing the voices and especially the ways in which they provide a vital entry point for examining the interaction between the individual and society and the paradoxes that are inherent in this interaction.

# CHAPTER 11: INEQUALITIES OF GENDER

## Separate Spheres

The doctrine of "separate spheres" which held sway in most Western countries until the early 20th century exemplifies a historically powerful ideology of gender. Arguing that males and female should dominate in different kinds of social activities because of purportedly essential differences in the biological and psychological natures of men and women, it was used to justify the relegation of women to the home and the assignment of men to economic work outside the home. Kramer (1991) suggests that this doctrine also exemplifies the complexity of cultural beliefs about gender at any given historical moment. Kramer posits however, that social class and ethnic hierarchies narrowed the range of people to whom the doctrine applied, thus the ability of privileged women to act in conformity with the precept depended in part on the availability of other women in the homes and businesses of the affluent (1991:16).

Ideological prescriptions of gender *ipso facto*, the perceptions of normative characteristics for both men and women, have been influenced by changes in contemporary society and more explicitly by forces associated with contemporary feminism. It is an issue with which I will deal more closely in a later chapter, as I turn now to other issues which encompass inequalities of gender.

## Gender Stratification

The concept of stratification is based on two major premises. First, every modern society consists of hierarchical groups and second, the principle according to

which these groups are ranked and the individuals included in them is based on their place in the production process. Over the last three decades, increasing attention has been given to the place of women in society and this has included concern with their position within the traditional system of social stratification. There is a plethora of literature relating to this phenomenon in both developed and developing societies. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, saw an intensified preoccupation with issues of stratification in so far as they affected women. The recurrent theme was that in simple societies, biological differences between the sexes necessitate a division of labour in which women are responsible for child rearing, while men perform the more important tasks which take place outside of the home. Along the same line of reasoning, but adopting a rather more sophisticated stance, some authors reasoned that a woman's role as mother, and the socializer of children, necessitates a devaluation of femininity in order for boys to develop a masculine identity (Chodorow 1974; Dinnerstein 1977).

The themes of sexual differentiation and inequality were emphasized in the literature of the 1950s and 1960s and early 1970s as studies sought to identify the linkages between the power structure in the society (with men being at the top of the ladder), and social and cultural factors, differential socialization and differential task assignment (Barry, Bacon & Child 1957; D'Andrade 1966; Ember 1973). By the end of the decade of the 70s these theories were being increasingly attacked as critics challenged the use of the household as the unit of stratification, and the use of the conventional "male breadwinner", "dependent housewife" as the norm (Acker 1973;

Archer and Giner 1971). Acker suggests that regardless of her marital status, a woman's own occupation should be taken into account and further, that the role of women without paid work, should be considered an occupation and given a particular place on the occupational scale (1973:940). By the early 1980s and onwards, feminist researchers had looked to other hypotheses as they examined women's disadvantaged position in the society. Yet as Stockard and Johnson (1986) maintain, gender stratification is still evident and affects women's position in the economy, in education, the family, and the polity in all countries.

Rosaldo (1974) reflecting on the situation from an anthropological aspect, notes that women are "heirs to a sociological tradition that treats them as essentially uninteresting and irrelevant" and argues that women may be important, powerful and influential, but that "relative to men of their age and social status, women everywhere lack generally recognized and culturally valued authority". Earlier, Rosaldo and Lamphere had determined that there is overwhelming evidence that virtually no society in the world provides women equal status with men. After reviewing women's studies in a number of societies, they conclude:

> ...women are excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than are the roles of men...all contemporary societies are male-dominated and although the expressions of subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life. (1974:3)

In her seminal study on women's role in economic development, Boserup (1970) advanced a holistic argument that encompassed men, women and children as social actors who resided in families and households in non-capitalist sectors. It was argued

that development analyses which had been ongoing during the 1950s and 1960s were articulated against a background of purely economic phenomena and that women were systematically omitted from these analyses. The situation has been exacerbated by what Nelson (1979) identifies as the "marginalization of rural women" She argues that these women have been particularly neglected and this has been mainly a result of the androcentric and ethnocentric orientations of those in control of resources. She observes:

> Many men have a way of perceiving women as basically peripheral to any important socio-economic process (unless it be child care or family planning, which are very obviously the concern of women)...women have been seen as the dependents of males, and their proper place has been in the calculation of dependency ratios. The fact that many of the planners, funding agency officials and development "experts" have also been middle-class western men with particular views on the proper place of women can only have contributed to this perception of women's proper place in the development process. (1979:10)

## A Global Perspective

The first United Nations Conference on the Decade for Women held in Mexico City in July, 1975 envisaged a world in which women would be equal partners with men, developing a future in which education, employment and health are made available to all, and peace would be a process as well as a goal. The Plan of Action adopted by the delegates to that Conference predicted that "in our times, women's role will emerge as a powerful, revolutionary social force".[2] It was a prediction which offered great hope, yet by 1980 the United Nations was forced to admit that although women comprise 50 per cent of the world's adult population and represent one third of the official labour force, and perform almost two thirds of all working hours, yet

they receive only one tenth of the world's income.[3] The stark reality of these fractions and the enormous implications which they have had for women, especially those in the Third World, have not only led to intense criticism of the ways in which the economic position of women has been assessed, but also of the very development strategies which have been articulated to alleviate this position. As Sen and Grown note, rather than showing improvement, the socioeconomic status of the great majority of Third World women deteriorated considerably throughout the Decade. They contend that "with few exceptions, women's relative access to economic resources, income and employment worsened, their burdens of work increased and their relative and even absolute health, nutritional, and educational status declined" (1987:16).

## The Industrialization Process

Benavot (1989) suggests that an industrializing system requires skills wherever it can find them and this has the effect of weakening racial, ethnic and social barriers. Consequently industrialization may be regarded as perhaps the most important factor operating on women's lives today. The problem is particularly acute in the Third World where according to Acosta-Belen and Bose "most of the development strategies and policies have been formulated from the ideological and economic perspectives and interests of industrialized countries" (1990: 302).

There has also been condemnation of the ways in which colonization, urbanization, capitalism and dependent development have affected the lives of women (Abraham & Abraham 1988; Acosta-Belen & Bose 1990; Boserup 1970;

Bossen 1975; Martin & Voorhies 1975). It is also postulated that women in Third World countries are adversely affected by the international exchange system which places developing nations in a position of dependency development (Bossen 1975; Charlton, Everett & Staudt 1989; Safa 1978; Saffioti 1975). Bossen proposes that dependency theory associates integration into a world market economy with increasing class inequalities based on capitalist relations within and between nations. In this situation, the position of women in Third World countries is not made better by development, instead the economic transformations of countries undergoing dependent development are associated with increases in class inequalities which impact negatively on women (Bossen 1975).

## Women and Modernization

It is the view of several authors that modernization has had a regressive effect on female political, economic and psychological autonomy and power (Elliot 1977; Tinker 1976; Van Allen 1976). Bossen proposes that modernization favours an inferior status of women and advances several criticisms of the general view that women's position improves with modernization. Among these criticisms are: (1) modernization and Westernization do not imply full equality for women in the modern Western nations. Therefore the likelihood that such processes do more than encourage the formal or legal appearance of such conditions in the rest of the world is in question; (2) important differences in the condition of women in traditional and modern societies may be the result of differences in the overall standard of living as well as changes in sexual equality; (3) by confusing dominant ideologies with actual

conditions, there is the tendency to obscure important differences in woman's position according to class or status (1975:588-9). In essence, Bossen argues that the global trend toward female equality "may be more apparent than real, particularly in the case of labor force participation, which really measures labor and which is used as an an index of women's position in society" (1975: 590).

## Women and the Labour Market

In reviewing issues involving women and work, Ferber (1982) notes that although one of the most important economic phenomena of recent decades has been the rapid increase in women's participation in the labour force, it may be argued that the degree and even the direction of women's labour supply may be attributed to various factors. Citing empirical data to support her thesis, Ferber indicates that important determinants of women's participation include education, industrial structure, family and attitudes and points out that there are marked variations among countries (1982: 286-287). Lynch argues that "the drastic increase in the level of female participation in the paid labour market worldwide, has not, however, been accompanied by any significant enhancement of the overall status of women, vis-a-vis men, despite their improved educational qualifications" (1989: 29). Sociologists of the labour market system propose a labour market segmentation theory as an alternative to the neo-classical model in which the labour market is seen as a single commodity market where workers are paid according to their productivity (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Oppenheimer 1970; Treiman and Hartman 1981). Inherent in this theory is the notion that better and worse jobs tend to be found in

different settings and are usually obtained in different ways. Moreover, certain types of labour force participants (women and visible minorities for example) are concentrated in the poor jobs (Krahn and Lowe 1988).

## Women in the Third World

In her contribution to the debate, Safa (1977) indicates that women in developing countries are affected by economic transformations both in their position within the labour force as well as in the class composition of the labour force. Saffioti, while agreeing with the assertion that the development of industrial capitalist production has produced a sexual division of labour, nevertheless argues that this division is not merely a matter of cultural diffusion of sex role stereotypes, but there is also an economic advantage for the capitalist sector in that it enables this sector to dispose of a labour force towards whose formation it never made any investment (Saffioti 1970 as quoted in Bossen 1975).

The economic crises of the 1980s and the stabilization and adjustment measures that have had to be taken in response to them, have taken their toll on women, especially those in developing countries, where they have suffered disproportionately during the widespread economic and social disruption which resulted as a consequence of structural adjustment measures. The 1990s have seen little amelioration of the position of women and they continue to be disadvantaged economically and socially. As well, their economic contribution is grossly under-recorded in official statistics. This is so because while participation in economic activity may be considered one of the most important contributions made by the

population in a country, measurement of this activity is a fairly recent phenomenon and too often the contribution of women in particular is not represented in the statistics of many developing countries. Since the concepts of the labour force have been developed around the experience of industrialized countries, they often fail to take into account the more informal activities within the economy in developing countries, and in these, women feature more substantially than men. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many countries have traditionally regarded activities performed by women in the household as non-contributory to economic productivity, a fact which exemplifies the androcentric disposition to which reference was made earlier (Waring 1991).

A comprehensive analysis of the expanding role of women is dependent upon the availability of supporting empirical data, but in many countries there is very little information of that type regarding the extent of women's contribution to the development of their countries through their participation in economic and social affairs. However, in recent years, largely as a result of recommendations from international organizations, including the International Labour Organization, and from international conferences relating to the position of women[4], statistical data bases on women have been created in many countries with the main aim of providing information on the status and activities of women, especially their restricted economic opportunities and increased familial obligations. This has led to increased documentation of the multiplicity and asymmetry of women's roles. Yet there has not been a commensurate augmentation of their status. At the same time, a number of

issues have been identified as significant to the study of the situation of women in the context under discussion. Although the importance of each issue varies from country to country, depending on its stage of development, its culture and traditions and, to some extent, the degree of inequality between men and women, in the Third World especially, researchers have moved away from a preoccupation with the role of women within the family toward an understanding of the complexity of women's employment in its wider connotation. Policy-makers are no longer focusing on family-centred programmes which see motherhood as the most important role for women in the development process and instead are looking toward a diversity of approaches which emphasize, but are not restricted to, the productive role of women.

Some of the principal issues identified for study relate to the role of women in family formation, families and households; population distribution, access to education and training for women, health and nutrition, female economic participation and labour force participation, legal rights and political power, and crimes committed against women (Moser 1991).

## Integrating Women into Development

Moser (1991) notes that there has been a further shift in approach in recent years, principally in academic writing, whereby attention has been drawn to the limitations of focusing on women in isolation and to the need to look at gender and development. Observing that gender-awareness approaches are concerned with the manner in which relationships between men and women are socially constructed, Moser posits:

> men and women play different roles in society, their gender differences being shaped by ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants. These roles show similarities and differences between classes as well as societies, and since the way they are socially constructed is always temporarily and spatially specific, gender divisions cannot be read off on checklists (1991:84).

In developed and developing countries, at international, regional and national levels, the strategies for integrating women into the development has been taking shape, at moderate or accelerated paces, depending on the commitment of the governments and agencies progressive progressed at a moderate pace. Nonetheless, Moser suggests that this has not meant that the issue of gender has been "satisfactorily incorporated into the wide diversity of planning disciplines concerned with the lives of low income communities in Third World countries

## Caribbean Realities

Caribbean women have not been isolated from the global trends which have been discussed in this presentation, and there is growing awareness of the ways in which the dynamic processes at work in the global environment, influence women in the region whose situation has been inextricably linked to the global-capitalist patriarchal model of accumulation, and hence must be seen within the framework of interlocking systems of race, gender and class oppression. Wiltshire-Brodber argues that the dominance of race, colour and class in Caribbean societies historically made the issue of gender peripheral to an understanding of power, dominance and change and that they also provided the central constraints around which political, economic, cultural and symbolic dominance factors were ordered. According to Wiltshire-Brodber:

> As representatives of the metropolitan rulers, both male and female Whites enjoyed unparalleled power and privilege. Because race and class mutually reinforced each other, with Whites at the top of the social ladder and Blacks at the base, these features also provided a central focus for resistance and change (1988:142).

However, Massiah (1990) indicates that compared to women in many parts of the developing world, Caribbean women today enjoy advantages in terms of life expectancy, education at both the primary and secondary levels and labour force participation rates. She warns, however, against adopting too complacent an attitude, noting that these visible advantages "mask a fundamental reality which is, that even in those territories with the most favourable statistical indicators, socioeconomic conditions continue to restrict women's participation in the economy, limit their mobility, and ignore the deleterious effect on women of the macroeconomic strategies of the 1980s" (1989:965). In similar vein, Finch (1989) argues that the reality is that despite significant advances over the years -- a process accelerated by the UN Decade for Women -- most Caribbean women remain largely marginalized and deprived. She notes further, that the visibility of the programs that came out of the United Nations Decade for Women have inspired some quantitative changes in women's lives over the last 10 years, but qualitatively, the problems remain (1987:20).

What might these problems be? It is generally acknowledged that many of the difficulties that women in the Caribbean face are directly related to the historical and cultural development of the region, and that the problems range from the social and educational to the economic and the political. Thus, an answer to the question may lie in the way in which the region developed historically and culturally and the

way in which women fit into that development pattern.

It is the thesis of some Caribbean sociologists and historians that the control of women has been a crucial element in maintaining the power of the oppressor groups, and that this has affected the ways in which their roles were conceptualized and implemented (Clarke 1957; Mathurin 1975; Powell 1984; Reddock 1986). Reddock (1986) points out for example, that during the pre European days, Carib Indians raided the Arawak settlements and captured the women in order to make use of their skills as agriculturalists. This control was intensified during the days of slavery, when female slaves were at the mercy of members of the plantocracy, so that their roles extended from worker in the fields, to cook, nanny and concubine.

## The Sexual Division of Labour

The assumption that certain occupational roles are more appropriate for men and for women is based mainly on a perception of what their social roles should be; the inference that men and women respectively are more physically suited to certain types of work endeavour, is one of the cornerstones on which traditional theories of the sexual division of labour rest. In the Caribbean, during the days of slavery, women worked alongside the men on the plantation doing the same type of manual work. With the arrival of emancipation, there began to emerge a sexual division of labour in which women were seen as primarily concerned with carrying out household and familial duties and the model of male breadwinner/female housewife began to assert itself. Describing this development Reddock notes:

> It was after the abolition of the slave trade that the ideology of Western marriage was actively encouraged and a greater division of labour encouraged. Men began to be paid more than women in spite of the experience during slavery of women performing better under hard conditions...women began to work less regularly in order to combine work with household production and the raising of their own children. (1986: 29)

Currently women in the Caribbean are mostly to be found working in such fields as nursing, teaching, clerical and service-related jobs which have been traditionally regarded as "female" jobs. Nonetheless, notions of what is considered appropriate or correct occupations for women have changed considerably and a sexual division of labour is not as insidious as previously.

## Household and Family Patterns

For the most part, the conjugal or household pattern that epitomizes many Western ideological structures is noticeably absent in the Caribbean. This classical concept in which a family and household consists of a co-residential group within which there is at least one conjugal pair plus at least some offspring of this pair does not, for the most part, characterize Caribbean society and indeed, as some anthropologists and sociologists have suggested, it remains a society in which family forms are diverse and far from simple (Clarke 1957; Horowitz 1971; Massiah 1983; Smith 1971; Soulien 1971). Anthropologists and sociologists who have investigated the Caribbean social setting, have found it useful to note the analytical distinction between the elementary family and the domestic group and it is proposed that the difference between the two may rest on the types of bonds obtaining among the members. Thus, while the elementary family is constituted solely by the bonds of

marriage, filiation, and siblingship, the household or domestic group may include persons bound together by various kinds of jural and affective bonds other than these. The typology suggested by Clarke (1957) introduces a further dichotomy in respect of the family organization in Caribbean communities, and although articulated four decades ago, it still remains relevant to the contemporary society. Clarke suggests a distinction between "family" households and "consanguineous" households in which the latter may consist of (1) denuded households in which there is only one parent, children and other linear relatives, (2) sibling households in which adult brothers and sisters live under one roof and (3) single person households. Massiah (1983) points to the high incidence of female-headed households in the Caribbean which are "typified mainly by the absence of an adult male in the relation of spouse or partner and in which the basic structural principle is the conjugal link between members" (1983:12). Ellis sums it up as follows:

> the European concept of the nuclear family with its ideology of patriarchy and male dominance, the woman-centred matriarchal type and the extended family type, legacies from the African and East Indian cultures respectively, all exist simultaneously in the region. Single parent families and female-headed households are realities for many women at all levels of Caribbean society. (1986:7)

## Women and Education

In the Caribbean, women's participation in education, like their participation in social end economic matters, has been an integral part of the official ideology of the region. As we shall see in a later chapter, the lives of all the people in the Caribbean were influenced by the historical development of the region, and the place of women in education must be examined within the context of the economic, social

and cultural hegemony of the colonial rulers and educators in order to highlight the effects which the inherited education system had on women in particular (Bacchus 1990; Ellis 1986; Figueroa 1971). Ellis indicates that during the colonial period, upper and middle class women were part of the small white elite, yet their education was a part of the socialization process which meant that both the content and purpose of their education were geared toward making them good wives and mothers. However, as women's access to, and participation in education have expanded, they not only have grasped the opportunity to begin reversing the trend of previous socialization and to pursue disciplines that were traditionally regarded as the preserve of the male, but the data show that they have also been outnumbering men in terms of enrolment in courses related to these disciplines.

The significance of this trend is particularly noticeable in enrolment patterns at the university level as may be discerned in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Student Enrollment by Faculty and Programme 1992/93 at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus*

| | Full Time | | | Part Time | | | Total | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | W | T | M | W | T | M | W | T |
| First Degrees | | | | | | | | | |
| AGS- B.A. Gen | 192 | 753 | 945 | 85 | 320 | 405 | 277 | 1073 | 1350 |
| EDUC - B.Ed | 45 | 117 | 162 | - | - | - | 45 | 117 | 162 |
| LAW - L.L.B. | 12 | 34 | 46 | - | - | - | 12 | 35 | 47 |
| Med.Sc. M.B.B.S. | 240 | 255 | 495 | - | - | - | 240 | 295 | 495 |
| Med.Sc. B.Sc. Nurs | 2 | 12 | 14 | - | - | - | 2 | 12 | 14 |
| Nat. Sc.- B.Sc.Gen | 572 | 587 | 1159 | 100 | 69 | 169 | 672 | 656 | 1328 |
| Soc. Sc.- B.Sc | 302 | 704 | 1106 | 211 | 283 | 494 | 613 | 987 | 1600 |
| **Sub-Total** | **1465** | **2462** | **3927** | **396** | **673** | **1068** | **1861** | **3135** | **4996** |

*Source: Office of the Registrar, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.

Table 2: Comparative Total Registration - University of the West Indies, Mona Campus - 1991/92 - 1992/93*

| | MEN | WOMEN | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991/92 | 2326 | 3958 | 6284 |
| 1992/93 | 2378 | 4124 | 6502 |

*Source: Office of the Registrar, University of the West Indies: Mona, Jamaica.

## Women's Roles

Studies of the woman in the Caribbean indicate that her role has always been a major one, particularly in respect of the maintenance of the family both socially and economically (Henry & Wilson 1975; Gonzalez 1981; Justus 1981; Massiah 1983; Massiah 1990; Moses 1981; Powell 1986). As a result, the Caribbean society has often been described as matriarchal, implying that women are in control. Accepting this description without a caveat, however, may be misleading, particularly if one embraces the formal definition of the matriarchal society as one in which "some, if not all, of the legal powers relating to the ordering and governing of the family: power over property, over inheritance, over marriage, over the house, are lodged in women rather than men".[5]

In the Caribbean, this presumption of matriarchy may only be valid in terms of the traditional sphere of influence - the family - where women are permitted to exercise a certain degree of control. Moreover, on closer analysis, even this situation may reveal that in many cases, the control which women have, is accorded by default through the phenomenon of "*fatherhood in absentia*", which is to say that the centrality of the female in the Caribbean family is in direct relation to the fact that

the male is often absent from the household. It may therefore be argued, that the role of the woman is more matrifocal in nature.

Sound and informed judgments about gender planning and strategies for change will depend to a great extent on the availability of empirical data, and the Caribbean falls into the category of small developing countries which until recently, have not had the benefit of extensive research on women's issues. Early initiatives by governments and non-governmental organizations to encourage the integration of women in development became more intense in the wake of the flurry of global activity which succeeded the United Nations Decade for Women. The first comprehensive study of women in the Caribbean - the Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) - which was undertaken between 1979 and 1982 was a direct consequence of the activities of the Decade and as Massiah (1986) notes, it was conceived essentially as a device to expand the empirical knowledge and understanding of the reality of the lives of women in the Caribbean.[6] The areas of focus were: sources of livelihood, emotional support, and power and authority.

The report of the findings of that study indicate, *inter alia*, that women's position in the Caribbean is characterized by a dual work role, as they engage in both household, and extra-household work and that in order to meet their social reproductive roles, they resort to becoming domestic brokers, pooling resources from their own economic activity and that of others and redistributing them to meet personal and family needs. With respect to female leadership and decision-making, it was discovered that women tend to accord to the man the position of household

head, although this pattern is not constant as there are some women in common-law relationships who see themselves in this role.

As far as sex-role identity and self-perception are concerned, there is still the socialization toward woman as wife and mother and there is some evidence of self-doubt in respect of their ability to be effective leaders. Reaction to relationships with males reveal the women's awareness and resentment of, the existence of male domination and the women's wish to be independent.

Whatever may be the underlying causes, the inescapable fact is, that for many women in the Caribbean today, the struggle to maintain a livelihood is still a major one and the obstacles they face are as much economic as they are social. Safa (1986) points out that questions still remain concerning the degree of sexual equality in the Caribbean society and that while the economic role of the Caribbean woman, at least in the lower middle-class, undoubtedly provides her with considerable autonomy and lessens her dependence on men, she may still look to men for emotional and material support.

# CHAPTER 111: BREAKING THE SILENCES

> If we continue to speak this sameness, if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they have taught us to speak, we will fail each other. Again...words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear. (Irigaray 1980:60)

## Patterns of Silence

The plea for a recognition of woman's essential and complete personhood and the opportunity for her to make her voice heard in an authoritative way have for a long time been at the centre of the maelstrom in the debates and arguments surrounding the "woman" question. This has meant an investigation of those issues which over time have contributed to the silencing of women's voices. One of these issues relates to gender consciousness which as Rinehart (1992) argues is a matter not only of gender identification, but of role ideology as well. The "traditional" gender role ideology and its variations, bears as its central dictum the restriction to the domestic sphere, but it may also extend to the utter obedience of women to men, whether they are fathers, husbands or members of the elite and by further extension to the development of patterns of silence. Into this silence has entered the voices of feminists, seeking to bring women out of the private world of silence and repression and into a public language that is unfettered by oppression.

## Patriarchal Discourses

Rich (1976) defines patriarchy as:

> The power of the fathers; a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men - by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. (1976:57)

Not surprisingly, therefore, one of the basic premises of feminist thought, whether it emanates from the individualist and egalitarian tradition of liberalism, the macroeconomic perspective of socialism or the metaphysics of existentialism, is the claim of women to the right of full participation in society. Thus, the theoretical debates that surround the question of women's position and status in contemporary society are inevitably embedded in issues related to the disadvantaged condition of women compared to men, and the effect of this subordination on important aspects of women's lives, including their ability to make their voices heard. The plethora of literature in this area is generated mostly from the women's perspective and places great emphasis on questions related to the images, representations and traditional theories developed about women by men and the struggle by women to transform patriarchy.

Weedon (1987) notes that feminists take as their starting point the patriarchal structure of society where the term patriarchal refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference, and in patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm that is male.

Over the past three decades an impressive body of feminist criticism has emerged to challenge patriarchal values and interests and the critics advance compelling arguments regarding the universal nature of the phenomenon. Eisenstein (1983) concedes that the word "patriarchy" might at first glance seem an

inappropriate term to characterize the situation of women in the modern world, at least in Western industrialized countries. She notes, however, that despite the many differences of detail distinguishing the lives of women in the West from those of their sisters both in the developed socialist countries and in the underdeveloped Third World, the fundamental fact of male domination over women could be discerned in all societies.

Thus, the major arguments that flow from this focus on patriarchal discourses are that patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference and that the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm that is male. *Ipso facto,* the social and political gains which women have made in recent years have been achieved against a background of struggle.

Welby notes that it is essential to understand the concept and theory of patriarchy to effectively capture the "depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of women's subordination", noting that this concept and theory can be developed in such a way as to take account of "the different forms of gender equality over time, class and ethnic group" (1990:2). The sexual division of labour in particular, with its advocacy for the equality of women with men, is seen as supporting a fundamental patriarchal assumption that women's biological difference from men fits them for different social tasks. Yet, as will be seen later, the theory of patriarchy has come under vigorous attack from Third World feminists who question the validity of the methodologies used to demonstrate the universalism of male dominance and female exploitation.

Mohanty (1991) proposes that concepts such as reproduction, the sexual division of labour, the family, household, and patriarchy are often used without specifying their relationship to local cultural and historical contexts. She asserts:

> Often the mere existence of a sexual division of labour is taken to be proof of oppression in various societies. This results from a confusion between and collapsing together of the descriptive and explanatory potential of the concept of the sexual division of labour. Superficially similar situations may have radically different, historically specific explanations and cannot be treated as identical. (1991:124).

## The Emerging Voices

The term "feminism" has been used to highlight women's oppression in relation to men, thus not surprisingly, feminism is sometimes seen as confined to women's struggles against oppressive gender relationships. In actual fact, both now and in the past, women have often acted against interconnecting relations of inequality that have revolved around many aspects of daily life and culture. Offen (1988) notes that by 1900, a veritable taxonomy of self-described or imputed feminisms had sprung into being: familial feminists, integral feminists, socialist feminists, radical feminists, male feminists among others. In recent years dualistic distinctions have been proposed to include "old" and "new" feminisms, "classical" and "modern" feminisms, "humanistic and "gynocentric" feminisms. Needless to say, this overwhelming array of distinctions often blurs the real issue under consideration and as Offen argues "to many people...the word feminism continues to inspire controversy and to arouse a visceral response - indeed, even to evoke fear among a sizable portion of the general public" (1988: 119).

Yet, in many instances it is not immediately self-evident what people mean when they speak of feminism as there are several differing political perspectives and feminism is sometimes seen as quite separate from any kind of politics in which men are involved. According to Code (1990) contemporary feminism is an active, evolving, politically engaged movement and as such has been instrumental in effecting fundamental changes in social practices and institutions. Weedon describes it thus:

> Feminism is a politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become. (1987:1)

Feminism, therefore, emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within society. Thus, radical feminists emphasize the primacy of women's subordination to men, which they regard as they key to changing society, while the liberal feminists argue that women should have equal opportunities within society to jobs and education, thus they oppose any discrimination against women. The social feminists on the other hand, think that women are oppressed not only by men, but by other forms of subordination, such as class and race inequality.

The nexus between feminism and feminist theory is encapsulated in Code's assertion that feminism "has been instrumental in effecting fundamental changes in social practices and institutions" and as such is "a theoretical project whose purpose is to understand the oppressive social practices that disadvantage women" (1991:18). In similar vein, Mitchell observes that feminism is "an ideological offspring of certain

social and economic conditions" (1971:162).

In highlighting the inherently synthetic nature of contemporary feminist theory, Ritzer notes that it has been formed out of the intersection of three broad inputs which are: (a) theories of gender differences, which is to say, biological, institutional, and social psychological theories of gender; (b) theories of gender inequalities, which include liberal feminism and Marxian feminism; and (c) theories of gender oppression, which include psychoanalytic, radical and socialist feminist theories (1992: 492).

The debate does not end here, however, and as feminist theorists attempt to grapple with the power and privilege differential between men and women, they have often differed in their identification of the primary features of women's oppression and the changing theories have reflected the shifts in the approach to the central theoretical concepts. Indeed, the schisms in feminism have seen the protagonists as much at odds with each other as with their opponents.

There is also the obvious discomfort with the fact that within feminist discourse women are presented as a homogenous group, sharing a common oppression. Arising out of this uneasiness are the voices of Black feminists in North America and Britain especially, and Third World feminists. The former object to what they see as racist and stereotyped perceptions of Black women, embodied in the rhetoric of white feminists (bell hooks 1981&1989; Collins 1989&1991; Davis 1981; Hull et al. 1981; Joseph & Lewis 1981; Moraga & Anzaldua 1981; Sandoval 1991).

Commenting on black women and feminism, bell hooks notes:

> At times, the insistence that feminism is really "a white female thing that has nothing to do with black women" masks black female rage towards white women, a rage rooted in the historical servant-served relationship where white women have used power to dominate, exploit and oppress...this resistance to white female domination must be separated from a black female refusal to bond with white women engaged in feminist struggle. (1989: 179)

Gayle (1992) charges that the exclusion of the experiences of women designated as "Other" has become so ensconced in the consciousness of western feminists that they tend not to see it as problematic and notes that treating Black women as a homogenous group "negates the cultural differences that exist among us." (1992:232). As we have seen before, Mohanty (1991) is equally unhappy with the universalistic assumption of "women as an oppressed group" that is situated in Western feminist writing. She too laments the fact that by advocating the notion of women as a homogenous category, Western feminism ultimately "robs women in the Third World of their historical and political agency" (1991:72).

Indeed, Third World women outside the United States contend that their source of oppression is not limited to or even primarily attributed to gender alone. Accordingly, gender oppression cannot be considered the single leg on which feminism should rest. Savane notes:

> For although the oppression of women is universal in nature...It is time to move beyond simple truisms about the situation of women to a more profound analysis of the mechanisms perpetuating the subordination of women in society...In the Third World, women's demands have been explicitly political, education and health as major issues *per se* and not so linked to their specific impact on women. In addition, women of the Third World perceive imperialism on their continents and especially of women. (1982:12)

Savane's words strike a responsive chord in Johnson-Odim, who states:

> Third World women can embrace the concept of gender-identity, but must reject an ideology solely based on gender. Feminism, therefore, must be a comprehensive and inclusive ideology and movement that incorporates yet transcends gender-specificity. We must create a feminist movement which struggles against those things which can clearly be shown to oppress women, whether based on race, sex or class or resulting from imperialism. Such a definition of feminism will allow us to isolate the gender-specific element in women's oppression while simultaneously relating it to broader issues, to the totality of what oppresses us as women. (1991: 323)

The arguments outlined above signify that not only is there a divergence in theoretical approaches but that there are also wide schisms that exist within the feminist community. Moreover, as Evans (1982) submits, there is a tension or conflict within feminism that is hardly mentioned, let alone analyzed in the feminist literature, which is, that so much time and energy have been spent delineating the differences between Marxist/socialist and radical/revolutionary feminists about the nature and substance of feminist theory that a prior disagreement is overlooked. The burning question is "Do feminists need theory at all?" It goes without saying, that disagreements notwithstanding, for most feminists this is a moot question.

Butler and Scott (1992) agree that theory is a highly contested term within feminist discourse, consequently they raise a number of provocative thoughts on the issue as they reflect on what qualifies as theory and whether theory is distinct from politics or is rather an insidious form of politics. Echoing the concerns of the "third-wave feminists", they question the political implications of using theory for feminist analysis, considering that some of what appears under the sign of theory has marked masculinist and Eurocentric roots. In answer to those who question the utility of

theory, Fildes stresses its inevitability, submitting that whether we like it or not, we all use theory. The only choice we have is whether to use it explicitly or not (1983:64). Concurring with this view, Hartsock notes:

> We must understand that theorizing is not just something done by academic intellectuals but that a theory is always implicit in our activity and goes so deep as to include our very understanding of reality. (1979:57)

Flax admits that feminist theory is an ever evolving process but argues that it is possible to identify an underlying goal, purpose and constituting object of feminist theorizing. It is her view that a fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyze gender: how gender is constituted and experienced and constituted and how we think about - or equally important - do not think about it. The study of gender relations, Flax argues further, includes but is not limited to, what are often considered the distinctly feminist issues: the situation of women and the analysis of male domination or patriarchy (1987: 622).

## Legitimating the Voices

The fact that many feminists see an insidious androcentricism in early theories which have been applied to sociological research, has resulted in a challenge to men's claims to "know" the nature of women and the nature of men. The assaults upon these epistemological foundations of "male-stream" theory pinpoint the fact that the subject matter of these theories reflects male concerns, deals with male activity and is directed away from issues involving, or of concern to, women. Thus, feminist scholars hasten to highlight sexist bias within prevailing theories, paradigms, disciplines and methodologies as well as in the findings of particular studies. Offen

(1983) points out that there is a pervasive androcentricism in the definition of intellectual problems as well as in specific theories, concepts and methods of interpretation of research which have fuelled efforts to distinguish between knowledge and prejudice; and Thiele (1986) argues that the legerdemain by which real women are made to disappear from theories about human society and polity deserves close attention. The forms their invisibility takes include exclusion, whereby "women for no given reason are simply dropped from the discourse", and alienation, in which "theories include women as subjects but do not speak of the parameters of women's lives without distortion" (1986: 33).

Feminist critique also trains an unrelenting gaze on scientific objectivity, seeing in it an expression of an essentially male approach to knowledge and the world. Mackinnon refers to this objectivity as the male epistemological stance which "does not comprehend its own perspectivity" (1982:538), while Hanen (1987) proposes that what has traditionally been seen as objective, neutral and unbiased is in itself caught up in a particular perspective of the world -- a perspective that is specifically male and that tends to exclude or devalue the experiences and the points of view of women. Certainly, one of the major issues in feminist epistemology relates to women's ways of knowing, the manner in which these ways can be articulated and the authority of those purporting to make the voices of women heard. In this regard, Lugones and Spelman complain that on the whole, men's accounts of women's lives have at best been false, a function of ignorance; and at worst malicious lies, a function of a knowledgeable desire to exploit and oppress.

According to these two scholars:

> The demand that the woman's voice be heard and attended to has been made for a variety of reasons: not just as to greatly increase the chances that true accounts of women's lives will be given, but also because the articulation of experience is among hallmarks of a self-determining individual or community. There are not just epistemological, but moral and political reasons for demanding that the woman's voice be heard, after centuries of androcentric din. (1983:574)

Contemporary feminists are therefore advocating new methods of systematic inquiry which will recognize the uniqueness of the "feminine" and the right of women to appropriate and define their own reality. Segal contends that scepticism over the importance of any objective change in women's lives goes hand in hand with the suggestion that practical struggles against women's inequality are of less significance than the need to recognize and value women's distinct ideas and experience, suppressed or ignored by the dominance of men's ideas and experience. Further, the cultural devaluation of all that is seen as "female, of women's most characteristic interest and activities is undeniable, and feminists have nearly always wished to assert and admire the power and strength of women and the importance of the work which they do" (1988: xi).

Arguing from a psychological standpoint, Gilligan suggests that men and women think differently and that women use "a different voice" from men in talking about their relationships with others. Insofar as development theory has been filtered through the male prism of bias of the theorists, females have not been looked at on their own terms but always in comparison with male subjects. As a consequence, their voices have not been heard. Women, she iterates, have "different ways

of imagining the human condition" and "different notions of what is of value in life" (1982:5). Further, Gilligan points out:

> When women feel excluded from direct participation in society, they see themselves as subject to a consensus of judgment made and enforced by men... as social conditions change - as women can more readily enter the labour force on their own terms and more readily control reproductive factors by the empowerment of technology - they are more likely to recognize choices and responsibilities in a new way. (1982:67)

D. Smith criticizes those structures and ideologies of society which have provided women with forms of thought, images, modes of expression, in which they were constrained to treat themselves as looked at from outside, as "other" (1979: 138). Accordingly, she notes the need for a systemic critique of social institutions and sociological frameworks which contribute to the making of decisions based on self-interest. To meet this need Smith argues for a sociology of women which will entail "relocating the sociological subject as actual individuals located in the everyday world" (1987: 98).

Smith also argues that women, "confronting an intellectual and cultural world largely made and certainly dominated by men, have learned how to name their oppression and discover it as oppression by sharing experiences in consciousness-raising groups" (1991:82). By actively questioning established methods and seeking alternatives, feminist sociologists have investigated ways of giving women's experience a voice in the sociological discourse. In so doing they have broadened the conception of what this might mean and have begun to confront and hopefully to overcome the discursive and political problems of such speech (1991: 83). Thus, the standpoint of

women insists on the validity of women's right to speak for themselves of their experience and the dissatisfaction with paternalistic politics premised on "malestream" conceptions of "women's nature", sustains feminist epistemological challenges to men's claims to "know" women's nature and what constitutes "women's best interests". (Hartsock 1983; Jaggar 1983; Smith 1979). Hartsock explains:

> A feminist standpoint emerges...out of the contradiction between the systematically differing structure of male and female life activity in western cultures. It expresses female experience at a particular time and place, located in a particular set of social relations. (1983:303)

## Voices of another Colour

The various issues that have inspired feminist interest in theories of knowledge have also produced divergent arguments concerning the premises of a "feminist epistemology." Women of the Third World and women of colour have questioned and have been unanimous in their rejection of the authority of western white feminists not only to allocate to themselves the ability to "know" what is in the interest of all women but also to use this knowledge as a referent for the rest of the world (Collins 1989; Joseph & Lewis 1981). In particular, Collins (1989) points out that Black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women. According to her:

> Black feminists have questioned not only what has been said about the Black women, but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so. (1989: 517)

As well, Collins claims that the similarities in material condition which Blacks have experienced as a result of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other systems of racial domination, have fostered shared Afrocentric values that permeate the family structure, religious institutions, culture, and community life of Blacks in varying parts of Africa, the Caribbean, South America and North America. It is this Afrocentric consciousness that infiltrates the shared history of people of African descent through the framework of a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology (1989: 747).

The marginalization of Black women within the patriarchal culture and the suppression of their voices through a maintenance of negative images has resulted in many instances having their reality defined by other people. Hooks (1984) puts this in the context of the politics of domination and as she points out:

> as subjects people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject. (1984: 42-43)

## Reconfiguring the Voices

Increasingly, some feminists are recognizing that theorizing must move from critique to construct, but a construct that must emanate from carefully thought out positions about the nature of male power and domination which have been the major focus of the critique. Grosz (1990) emphasizes the feminist theory must always function in two directions if it is to effectively challenge patriarchal knowledge. She recognizes the necessity of engaging in a project of challenging or criticizing prevailing social, political and theoretical relations, but argues that coupled with this

*negative* or *reactive* must be a positive, constructive project aimed at creating alternatives, not simply anti-sexist theory (1990:59). Grosz therefore, sees feminist theory existing as both a critique and a construct.

There is an acknowledgement that the reality of women's experiences demand a separation from patriarchal theoretical paradigms and the inadequate representations that they offer, and this has caused feminists to confront the challenge of either developing, or at best selecting, alternate and versatile theoretical and methodological procedures that will legitimate and sustain the critique of patriarchy.

## The Postmodern Discourse

To meet this challenge, feminist theorizing is relying more and more on a postmodernist discourse and its deep scepticism about universals and the transcendence of reason and its opposition to the notion of a singular, privileged, universal truth. As Giroux (1990) contends:

> In exposing the particularity of the alleged universals that constitute Eurocentric culture, postmodernism has revealed that the "truth" of Western culture is by design a metanarrative that ruthlessly expunges the stories, traditions, and voices of those who by virtue of their race, class and gender constitute the Other...Postmodern criticism provides an important theoretical and political service in assisting those deemed "Other", to reclaim their histories and their voices. (1990:56)

As a consequence, the dialectics of postmodernism and feminism have been in the forefront of theoretical debates, although Butler (1992) proposes that the salient question is not merely "What postmodernism poses for feminism? but rather "What is postmodernism"? Postmodernism is a puzzling label that seems to denote a variety

of positions and the many trends with which it is associated include hermeneutics, deconstruction, critical theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian analysis. The resulting controversy is noted by Collins:

> Few issues have generated more impassioned critical activity than postmodernism and the majority of attempts to define it as a movement or condition adopt an explicitly negative perspective, often insisting it signals the virtual end of civilization or at the very least the final victory of a berserk mass culture over authentic art. (1987:1)

Lyotard defines the postmodern as a condition in which the "grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (1984:20). Roseneau (1992) notes that within the diversity of post-modern pronouncements, as far as the social sciences are concerned, two broad general orientations, the sceptical post-modernists and the affirmative post-modernists can be delineated. The sceptical post-modernism offering a pessimistic, negative, gloomy assessment, argues that the post-modern age is one of fragmentation, disintegration, malaise, meaninglessness, vagueness or even absence of moral parameters and societal chaos. Affirmative post-modernists on the other hand, have a hopeful, optimistic view of the post-modern age and they are either open to positive political action (struggle and resistance) or content with the recognition of visionary, celebratory personal non-dogmatic projects that range from New Age religion to New Wave life-styles and include a whole spectrum of post-modern social movements.

## Cultural Revelations

Despite the controversy which has surrounded it, postmodernism has influenced a wide variety of disciplines. As Apple (1991) submits:

> [Postmodernism] manifests itself in a multitude of fields from architecture, literature, film and cultural studies in general to philosophy, sociology and education. It is hard to find an area of study where it has *not* had an impact. (1991:vii)

In the case of popular culture, postmodernism's attack on universalism has translated into a refusal of modernism's hostility to mass culture, and its reproduction of the elitist division between high and low culture (Foster 1983; Huyssen 1986). Rust notes that "popular culture has not only become legitimate but also has begun to inform high culture in ways that would have been unthinkable in the modern age (1991:624).

When referring to cultural post-modernism, therefore, many writers contend that the fundamental movement of this epoch entails a blurring of cultural and aesthetic boundaries and a break-down of static-subject positions (Jameson 1983; Lyotard 1984). Giroux observes that postmodernism's reaffirmation of popular culture has challenged the aesthetic and epistemological divisions supportive of academic disciplines and the contours of what has been considered "serious" taste, but it has also resulted in new forms of art, film-making, writing and types of aesthetic and social criticism (1988:16-17).

Lee (1987) insists that the question of postmodernism, women, and popular culture has been dealt with only peripherally and challenges the efficacy of the "currently culturally pluralist, postmodern climate", where "hybrid styles abound [which]...challenge our most deep-rooted orientations to the world whether...in terms

of art/culture, elite/popular or male/female and wonders about their effect on the participation of women in this culture" (1987:66). Lee's concern is apparently with the location the voices and art of women within a postmodernist aesthetic that applauds the plurality of styles in a seemingly arbitrary way.

Is postmodernism therefore the answer that feminists are seeking? If so, what then is at stake in the debate surrounding a possible intersection between feminist theory and postmodern theory? Owens argues that there is an "apparent crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation" (1983:59) and consequently both feminism and postmodernism share common ground in the sense that both present a critique of forms of narrative and man's androcentric representation of the world in which he has constructed himself as "subject" (1983:65).

Despite the allure of the postmodernist viewpoint for some feminist scholars, there are others who see a feminist problematic and urge caution in respect of the unequivocally enthusiastic embrace with which feminism greets postmodernism. Flax (1986) notes that feminist notions of the self, knowledge and truth are too contradictory to those of the Enlightenment to be contained within its categories, thus feminist theorists "enter into and echo post-modernist discourses as we have begun to deconstruct notions of reason, knowledge or the self and to reveal the effects of gender arrangements beneath their 'neutral' or universalizing facades" (1986:196). The problem however lies in the fact that in the "de-centered" world, the existence of gender itself has been problematized. Thus, there are questions which

need to be asked such as "What are the relations between forms of male dominance and gender?" and "Is there anything distinctly "male" or "female" in modes of thought and social relations?"

An answer to these questions may be extrapolated from Creed's assertion that one of the positions central to postmodernism is, that there are no places left from which to speak - there are no "Truths", "Beliefs", or "Positions". Yet as she warns, this is in itself a position, and one now in danger of becoming a new orthodoxy. Thus, as Creed notes "the paradox in which feminists find themselves is that while they regard patriarchal discourses as fictions, they nevertheless proceed as if their position, based on a belief in the oppression of women, were somehow closer to the truth" (1987:68). Felski also comments that feminism cannot "simply sidestep the political and epistemological issues posed in recent theoretical debates" and that the appeal to the postmodern "tends to blur diverse nonsychronous political interests, obscuring rather than illuminating feminism's distinctive engagement with the ideas and institutions of modernity" (1990:43).

Thus, although feminists recognize that truth must be shared, analyzed and strategically deployed in the political struggle, they appreciated that injected into the hubris, must be the sobering questions as to whose truth and whose authority are to be maintained. Feminists must therefore come full circle and ask honestly whether new discourses are indeed rejecting patriarchal discourses or whether some voices, in this case feminine voices, are more authoritative than others. In this regard, Sawicki (1991) senses the dangers of becoming too comfortable with oneself, one's

community, one's sense of reality, one's truths. It is a premise that prompts De Lauretis to maintain:

> Feminist theory requires giving up a place that is safe, that is "home" physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically - for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually 'other'; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. (1990:138)

In the final analysis, Hawkesworth sums up the situation adequately when she contends that "postmodernist discourses celebrate the human capacity to misunderstand, to universalize the particular and the idiosyncratic, to privilege the ethnocentric, and to conflate truth with those prejudices that advantage the knower" (1989:554). In commending postmodernism she also notes:

> Its attentiveness to discourse has heightened our understanding of the integral relations between power and knowledge, and of the means by which particular power/knowledge constellations constitute us as subjects in a determinate order of things. (1989:555).

The next chapter examines, among other things, some new paradigms for empowering the voices of women, and contemplates the efficacy of the postmodern construct for conducting research about Caribbean women and in the process, enabling their voices to become empowered.

# CHAPTER 1V: THE INVESTIGATION: PROCESS AND METHOD

## Empowering the Voice through New Paradigms

Feminist scholars recognize that the challenge to the patriarchal, authoritarian and sexist structure of positivist methodologies must go beyond an identification of omissions and must devise ways of "breaking the silences". Yet as Rich observes:

> Breaking the silences, telling our tales is not enough. We can value the process and the courage it may require, without believing that it is an end in itself. (1986:144)

In addressing the question of new paradigms Kuhn (1970) describes the process of major theoretical reorientations within science as a process that starts with the existence of a crisis within a particular science, which may be externally or internally generated. Prior to the crisis there exists a paradigm that guides research:

> One of the things a scientific community acquires with a paradigm is a criterion for choosing problems that, while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions. To a great extent these are the only problems that the community will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake. Other problems, including many that had previously been standard, are rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or sometimes as just too problematic to be worth the time. (Kuhn 1970:37)

When a crisis becomes so acute that an entire paradigm is called into question, the search for alternative solutions commences, but as Kuhn emphasizes, once a new paradigm has been formulated, it will in time, come to replace the previous paradigm, but only against concerted resistance, and no existing paradigm will be rejected simply because flaws within it have been uncovered (1970: 64-65).

Given Kuhn's analysis of the nature of paradigmatic shifts, it is pertinent to inquire where the issues of feminist research and feminist methodology fall. Addressing the issue of whether the feminist critique of social scientific method and the erosion of positivist claims to social scientific knowledge have resulted in a feminist methodology, Cook and Fonow contend that it is difficult to formulate a closed concept of feminist methodology. On the one hand, it is often presented as consisting of a number of assertions about the nature of social reality and sociological inquiry and on the other hand, pieces of empirical research may incorporate only one, two, or perhaps three of these ideas (1985:3). However Eichler (1988) makes a spirited appeal for the careful assessment of methodology, noting that the argument for qualitative methods for feminist research usually centres around our collective lack of knowledge about women, the inherent flaw in using instruments developed for male subjects as being appropriate for female subjects, and the belief that women should nonetheless be able to tell their own story.

Be that as it may, paradigmatic shifts in feminist research and methodology have resulted in the investigation of empowering methodologies which Lather (1991) describes as an essential step in social transformation. Reinharz asserts that new paradigm research is research that encompasses a set of assumptions that contrast with those assumptions of the dominant positivist paradigm and use a "... variety of methods that fall in the general rubric of qualitative research..."(1981:416). According to the Personal Narratives Group "the feminist revision of the search for knowledge has sent us to new methods and new places, and has encouraged the hunt

for new sources of insight into women's realities: (1990: 263). The result is that feminist researchers are demanding that those who have been objectified should now be able to defend themselves, and tell their own stories. They are seeking to accentuate what Code describes as "philosophical beliefs about knowledge and authority that inform and are informed by social conceptions of what it is -ideally- to be a good knower and about how knowledge confers expertise" ( Code 1991:xi). They are therefore drawing upon research designs in which the highlighting of the sense of self is seen not only as an essentially narrative phenomenon, but also as a rejection of women's historical status as the object of the male subject's defining gaze. However, as Stivers observes this is "essentially a claim that each human being occupies a legitimate position from which to experience, interpret, and constitute the world" (1993:411). Stivers also issues the following caveat:

> The feminist search for the truths of women's lives implies the needed possibility not only of distinguishing meaningfully between the researcher and field but also of letting the field speak for itself in such a way that a claim of authenticity can be sustained. This question becomes particularly pertinent when it comes to interviewing or recording life histories. (1993:412)

For the women of the Caribbean, and the Third World in general, the realization that the voices of women such as Rigoberta Menchu can be a part of the ideological and political struggle waged by those who are silenced, against the hegemony of the dominant classes, serves as an exemplar of the liberation of self through the empowering of the voices. The realities of Caribbean women are naturally affected by the cultural and geographical milieu in which they exist, and research about Caribbean women ought to seek to articulate the viewpoints and experiences of these

women within the social world in which they live. Accordingly, the fluidity of the postmodern construct allows for, and takes into account, the shifting contexts in which these women find themselves: contexts that include the objective historical, economic, social and cultural. Indeed, as Barriteau Foster maintains, it is difficult to ignore the fact that critical dimensions of the experiences of Caribbean women have been missed because investigations in the past have used traditional liberal, epistemological and methodological frames of analysis which do not have the capacity to make sense of the complexities of Caribbean women's realities. Supporting the use of postmodernist theory for research about Caribbean women, she urges:

> This [postmodernist] theory recognizes and encourages the continuity in Caribbean's women's actions to impose themselves on their environment and ...some research prescribe [sic] a particular way of coping, ignoring, or not discovering how these women are manipulating their environment even as they grapple with its constraints. Sometimes the strategies these women use burst the confines of imposed methodologies. But often the significance is lost because these actions do not fit the frame. This theory demonstrates the space for women to influence their environment...and it responds to the challenge to create an indigenous feminist theory to guide social science research on women. (1992:36)

It is against this background that the investigation into the lives of the female calypso singers has been conducted and the rest of the chapter outlines the strategies which were deployed in this regard.

## Focus of the Research

This research focussed on female calypso singers and their experiences in the genre, using this microcosm to explore whether there was a relationship between gender and occupational experiences. In essence, in looking out of the window with

the women's eyes, it delved into the realm of the ideological prescriptions operating in the society at large. What is the tableau which unfolds before the eyes of the women? What do they see and how does this view impact on and reinforce how they interpreted their lives and reconstructed environment? The major research question was "What does it mean to be a female calypso singer?" This question was the central one addressed to the women and using it jumping off point, the narrators reflected on their lives as calypso singers.

## The Design

In this study I was forced to make a number of early decisions in order to set reasonable limitations on the scope of the research. These included the choice of research sites, the identification and selection of the respondents, and the methodology to be utilized, including the type and depth of information to be collected from each respondent.

## Selecting the Research Sites

One of my first tasks was to determine the site or sites where the research was to be undertaken. The final decision reflected not only the cultural and historical relevance of the locations, but also the fact that their proximity to each other would facilitate the process. All the countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean share in general terms, a similar historical and social heritage and calypso singing is now an activity that takes place in several of these territories. However, Trinidad and Tobago was an obvious choice because it is acknowledged to be the country that has the longest established tradition, one that goes back some 150 years, and the greatest

number of active calypsonians. In Guyana and Barbados, the tradition is more recent, but these countries too, have a number of established calypsonians, both male and female. Profiles of the research sites are in Appendix 11.

## The Method

I decided to address the fractious issue of methodology early. Lorber and Farrell (1991) claim that feminist methods of doing research attempt to probe social realities that are layered, symbolic, and embedded in the concrete, the particular, everyday life, but imply that in order to differ from masculinist methods, they must ensure that feminist research strategies are not perpetuating "masculine" modes of inquiry and in the process sustain a concomitant denigration of "feminine" methods.

## Assumptions

Many researchers agree that assumptions are important to feminist research as we are all females and males embedded in our society, and as female researchers we bring to the research, not only biases but idiosyncratic patterns of recognition (Krieger 1985; Reinharz 1979; Roberts 1981). The issue of assumptions is also critical when one is doing fieldwork in one's own culture. As a Caribbean national and as a person who is familiar with the research sites, I could be considered someone doing fieldwork in my own culture. Yet Aamodt points out that while one cannot claim the role of privileged stranger in one's own community, it is an ethnographic mistake to assume that in doing research in one's own community, one may be considered a native (Aamodt 1981, quoted in Field 1989). And Field (1989) also observes hat problems can arise if the researcher enters the study believing that the culture is

already familiar; as he or she runs the risk that important pieces of data will be overlooked. It was an injunction that I took seriously as I approached this study, at all times aware that as a Black Caribbean woman investigating the lives of other Caribbean women, who were mostly black, I could easily be robbed of a value-free evaluation owing to pre-judgments that I may have internalized unwittingly as a part of my own experience and realities.

## Adopting a Paradigm

Grant et al. (1987) postulate that qualitative methods such as participant or non-participant observation or interviews, are appropriate for inquiries into unexplored topics in social life in which women rather than men are the central actors. In so doing, they concur with Bernard (1973) that important dimensions of women's lives are contained within private, emotional realms and that significant events in these lives are subtle and context-bound. Thus they are better illuminated by qualitative rather than quantitative approaches. Therefore, in seeking to explore the dynamics of the lives of female calypsonians, through their interactive experiences, I welcomed the opportunity to place them at the centre, to position them as subjects rather than as objects. In essence, it entailed a methodology that would establish the women's voice as the authoritative one, and one that would create a rich evidentiary record for analysis and assessment of complex social processes. I therefore investigated the use of oral narrative as a means of achieving the objectives I had in mind.

## The Narrative Paradigm

Interest in narrative as a way of knowing has sparked interest among researchers. Witherell and Noddings acknowledge the central role that narrative structure plays in the realization of self and in the construction, transmission, and transformations of cultures (1991:3). The pervasiveness of narrative in the human and social sciences has been expounded upon by a number of writers, although the slant to the respective expositions has depended on the particular orientation of the writer in question; Narrative has been elaborated upon in respect of its relationship, *inter alia*, to history, literature, psychology, existentialism and to women's experiences. White suggests that it is through narratives that we "translate knowing into telling" (1981:1) and Polkinghorne (1988) asserts that narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful experiences. Because it is a cognitive process, this meaning is not an "object" available to direct observation, yet the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narratives are available for direct observation (1988:1). Examples of narrative include personal and social histories, myths and the everyday stories we use to explain our own and others' actions. The narrative, therefore, provides a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions (1988:11).

Bruner makes a distinction between the logico-scientific or "paradigmatic" mode and the narrative mode contending that each provides distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality (1986:11). Commenting on this

distinction, Polkinghorne maintains that "the paradigmatic mode searches for universal truth conditions, whereas the narrative mode looks for particular connections between events (1988:17). Likewise, Riessman states that "as a universal human form for reconstructing and interpreting the past, narratives link our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience" (1990:217).

Research with narrative

According to Polkinghorne investigations related to the narrative can be distinguished according to the purpose of the research. Thus, there can be descriptive research or explanatory research, the former being used to produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives meaningful (1988:161-162).

Small wonder it is then that the investigation of women's lives through the narrative, has gained currency among researchers (Armitage 1983; Gluck and Patai 1991; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Richardson 1990; Smith 1993; Stivers 1993). It is the view of these investigators that listening to women's voices and learning about women's experiences have been crucial to the reconstruction of our understanding of the world. In addition, given the concern of feminist theory regarding the power inequalities between men and women, women's personal narratives are helpful in understanding androcentric hegemony because they document a variety of responses to it (Personal Narratives Group, 1989: 6-7).

According to this same source:

> If women's personal narratives both present and interpret the impact of gender roles on women's lives, they are especially suitable documents for illuminating several aspects of gender relations: the construction of gendered self-identity, the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms and the dynamics of power relations between women and men. (1989:5)

Reflecting on the expanding influence of the personal narrative, S. Smith (1993) contends that until the last several decades, very little attention was paid to personal narratives and they were dismissed as "popular forms that lacked the sophisticated structure, language play, and poetics of form such as the novel" (1993: 392). However, they are now gaining the attention of social scientists because they raise issues concerning something that used to be called the self but is now called the subject. Smith advances the proposition that:

> For some, the subject actively negotiates cultural discourses as an agent of resistance. However understood, the subject fascinates us, and so the contemporary fascination with personal narratives... Reading personal narratives, we find ourselves immersed in complex issues of representation, ideology, history, identity and politics as they bear on subjectivity. (1993:393)

On the subject of personal narrative as a research tool, Stivers submits that there is no such thing as "unbiased knowledge in the sense of knowledge ungrounded in a set of intellectual assumptions and constituted interests" and that this awareness "validates the kind of particular, contextual knowledge personal narrative imparts and undercuts the universalizing claims that feminism is in the process of deconstructing" (1993: 410). Moreover, since feminist research highlights the sense of self as an essentially narrative phenomenon, the utilization of the narrative approach as a

means of confirming reality is seen as important in exploring and generating new insights of women's experiences of themselves in their worlds (Stivers 1993:411).

However, some researchers point out that this approach may diminish, but does not completely eliminate the danger of ethnocentric as well as androcentric hegemony. Sommer, for example, proposes that "the very manner in which we perceive personal narratives reflects the trappings of Western thought" (1988: 118). Stressing the need for more research on Black women's life stories, Etter-Lewis maintains that "the narrative self that is defined by the 'mythical male norm' is the centre of the universe and is empowered by the notion that the individual is more important than the group "(1991:43). In the end I felt that by utilizing this method, I was giving Caribbean women a chance for self-definition and that by paying attention to the individual journeys of the female calypsonians through the life cycle new vistas that could offer unexpected precedents or fresh insights might be opened.

## Sources of the Data

The primary data were obtained by tape recorded interviews in which the narrators responded to the researcher's invitation to respond to questions related to the study. I supplemented the data obtained from respondents with documentary data from newspaper and magazine articles and videotapes. In addition, I examined documents located in the West Indiana section of the University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus. This facility houses an impressive collection of reference material on the calypso and calypsonians, including unpublished research material on the topic by students of Caribbean studies.

## Selecting the Narrators

From my discussions with the key informants, and from perusal of documents, I was able to ascertain the approximate numbers of women who were singing in the respective countries and to identify most of these women. I therefore had to make a decision on who would be the ones invited to participate in the study. After some reflection, I decided to select respondents through nominated samples. Nominated sampling is a common method of obtaining a qualitative sample; these samples are obtained by eliciting the support and assistance of a single informant already in the field to assist with the selection of another participant (Morse 1989: 119). The underlying assumption is that those within the group can recognize the insiders and the outsiders, know who is most knowledgeable about certain topics and, therefore, can recommend to the researcher the person who could provide the most information and the best interview. Although this decision meant that the selection was partly controlled by the respondents, it was one with which I was comfortable and which ultimately worked well for me in this study. In all three countries, respondents were able to recommend others who could participate in the study. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, I had not thought of interviewing the Junior Calypso Monarch, but on the recommendation of the other respondents, I did so and in this way got a perspective of the problem from a special angle: that of the youth.

Finally, I felt that this approach paid dividends not only in terms of the richness of the data obtained, but also in the sense of trust which was evinced on the

part of the respondents who had been given a greater participatory role in the process than they had anticipated.

## Making Contact

In Barbados, the process of connecting was relatively simple because very few women are calypsonians. I made contact with the managers of the women who were identified because I had been informed that this was an approach that was "politically correct". I then telephoned each of the respondents to ascertain her willingness to participate in the study and to determine a time and place for the interview. In Guyana, I realized that none of the women had managers so I first spoke to the secretary of the Calypsonians' Association. None of the women had telephones, so I had to visit each one at her home to make the preliminary contact. The situation was different in Trinidad and Tobago where female calypsonians abound and the problem was not in fact making contact, but trying to pin the women down to a time and place. I again resorted to the "insider" technique and through nominated sampling, 12 women were identified, of whom eight were available.

Although in most cases, the women's active participation in the genre, either on a full-time or part-time basis, was an important consideration, I adopted a position of flexibility and adaptability, so that although one respondent had withdrawn voluntarily from the calypso scene (but not from the entertainment environment), I felt that the issues surrounding both her initial participation and withdrawal were important enough to justify her inclusion in the study. In another instance, the respondent had recently retired from active singing on account of ill-

health, but was still involved with the genre in another capacity. I also tried to get as wide an age range as possible, although in the final analysis, by coincidence, most of the women fell between the 30-39 years category. Table 3 shows the age range of the narrators.

Table 3: Age Range of Female Calypsonians Interviewed

| Age Range (in years) | No. of Women |
|---|---|
| 1-9 | 1 |
| 10-19 | 1 |
| 20-29 | 3 |
| 30-39 | 10 |
| 40-49 | 1 |
| 50-59 | 1 |

## Organizing the Field Research

The fact that the field research was being conducted in three countries, not only required detailed organization but also posed some problems, not the least of which was the difficulty of scheduling so many appointments within a limited period. This could not be helped however, because there was a sensitivity in relation to the timing of the exercise, which was unavoidable. This question of timing was important because the Mashramani and Carnival festivals in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago respectively are celebrated in close proximity to each other. In Guyana, calypso singing is at its most intense during this period, and the probability of observing the respondents in live performances was greater than at any other period, whereas in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, it was more expedient to conduct the study during

the Carnival celebrations, since immediately after the close, many of the calypsonians travel abroad to fulfil engagements.

The process of organizing the field research, therefore, started well in advance of my arrival in the respective territories. As a Caribbean national, I did not have to obtain a visa to visit the research sites. However, issues such as co-ordinating airline schedules, which in other areas might not be problematic, were of vital importance here. For example, it is almost impossible to get airline flights into Trinidad and Tobago in the days prior to the Carnival and conversely out of the country in the days following the Carnival. I therefore had to make these bookings at least two months before my actual date of travel. By an unusual mischance, the Mashramani celebrations in Guyana were taking place at the same time as the Carnival celebrations in Trinidad and Tobago, and this necessitated careful planning to enable me to catch live performances in both locations.

## Working in the Field

The research was done in two phases and the total time spent in the field was 12 weeks. The first phase which was in the summer of 1992 lasted four weeks and during this time I had preliminary interviews with three women in Guyana and three in Trinidad and Tobago. During this period, I also made preliminary arrangements to consult the documentary sources at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. The second phase which lasted eight weeks, was during the months of February and March 1993, and on this occasion I met separately with respondents in Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. On

the second visit, I met with three women in Guyana, two of whom were from the original group and a third person, who was out of the country during my first visit. The third person from the original group was out of the country on this occasion. Seven women from Trinidad and Tobago were interviewed, three being from the original group, while the women in Barbados were interviewed for the first time.

Attempting to do interviews during the Mashramani and Carnival periods had its drawbacks, which I discovered very early. In Guyana, the Mashramani Calypso competitions were taking place at venues across the country and the women were moving from location to location. In Trinidad, the scene was even more intense as many of the women were performing at the tents every evening and these performances did not end until the early hours of the morning. As a consequence, setting up the appointments proved to be a very frustrating exercise, at times, and it was only through sheer persistence on my part that some of the interviews did take place.

In all instances, once contact was made, I allowed the respondent to choose the time and place for the interview and this arrangement worked very well, especially in Barbados and Guyana. In Trinidad and Tobago, adhering to this decision meant that in one case I was forced to conduct the interviews at the venue where the women were performing and this did not make for a comfortable situation. In the first place, the only time available for the interview was at 11.00 p.m. In the second place, although the interview was being conducted in an office which was some distance away from the main performance venue, the room was not sound

proof. The disadvantage of this soon became apparent as whenever a change in the noise level signalled any unusual activity, the women would rush to the door to investigate the cause. During one narration, the woman heard some music which she liked and immediately interrupted the narrative to explain that the song was one of her favourites, spontaneously hummed a few bars of the music, and then returned to the matter at hand. Shortly afterward, a fight broke out in another location and the women again rushed to the door to observe the proceedings. The remarkable fact was that despite these interruptions, the stories which the women told were not lacking in coherence or irrelevant to the research.

## The Sensitization Process

Before meeting with the respondents, I embarked on a process of "informing the researcher" : that is, I set out to get as much information as possible from key informants, on the history of the calypso, and the performance environment, including the management and marketing aspect and the staging of competitions. The key informants were the secretary of the Calypsonians' Association in Guyana, the Director of the Caribbean Intercultural Music Institute, the entertainment editor of a daily newspaper in Trinidad and Tobago, a calypso researcher from the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus and an ethnomusicologist from Trinidad and Tobago. They were all chosen for their special knowledge of the genre and their ability to provide me with information which may not have been otherwise accessible to me because of constraints of time. Had I been denied those invaluable points of contact, insights to certain issues would not have been immediately evident to me.

It was also an opportunity to sensitize me to value dilemmas within the culture of which I may not have been ordinarily aware.

This procedure was very useful to me as it not only enhanced the way in which I listened subsequently to the voices of the women, enabling me as it were, to hear the women's perspectives more accurately, but it also afforded me the opportunity to receive what Anderson and Jack describe as "the dominant and the muted channels". I explain this concept in the following section.

## Gathering the Data

### The Interviews

Bell intimates that "a major advantage of the interview is its adaptability", noting that "a skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings which a questionnaire can never do" (1987:70). It is a view which is shared by Anderson and Jack (1989) who suggest that the spontaneous exchange within an interview offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators alike. For the narrator, the interview provides the opportunity to tell her own story in her own terms, while for the researcher, taped interviews preserve a living interchange for present and future use. I had earlier considered obtaining the data through the use of questionnaires, but the compelling nature of the arguments set out above, and my intuition that this method would neither reflect nor reveal intrinsic richness of data, convinced me that the interview procedure would allow the women to talk openly about their lives, once I could gain their confidence and offer to each a sense of her importance and valued contribution in the exercise.

However, exploring women's lives through the medium of personal narratives is not without its problematic aspect, and this is attested to by several researchers (Anderson and Jack 1990; Collins 1986; Oakley 1981; Riessman 1990). Anderson and Jack claim that "a woman's discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience" (1991:11). Where experience does not "fit" dominant meanings, alternative concepts may not be readily available. Hence, women often "mute their thoughts and feelings when they try to describe events in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions" (1991:11). Therefore being on guard for this eventuality (although I was not sure if I would always recognize it should it occur), was a prominent factor during the interviews.

## Initiating the Probe

Initially, there was a feeling of apprehension on my part as to whether these women would open up fully to me, a total stranger. Would they be willing to share with me their private lives, explore with me memories that could be extremely personal and perhaps painful? I wondered just how much space I should allow between myself and the narrators to facilitate an establishment of mutual trust. And in order to create the space which I felt was necessary and to emphasize the collaborative nature of the exercise, I assured the respondents at the very beginning

that the exercise was going to be a sharing relationship in which the major objective was to capture *their* experiences in *their* own words.

I placed my confidence in the view advanced by Selltiz et al. that "the interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased" (1965: 576). I therefore adopted an informal, conversational approach and before the start of each interview, there was a "getting to know each other" session during which the scope and purpose of the study were explained to the respondents. It was during this period that narrators talked about themselves in a general sense, giving information about their family background, schooling, family and other social relationships. It was the period when one narrator, even spoke about her quest for affordable housing for herself and her family and the frustrations which she experienced. I used this session to explain the implications of the informed consent and withdrawal- from- the- study forms and to invite any questions which they may have had before commencing the interview proper. They were also invited to affix their signature to the forms. Samples of the Informed Consent form and Withdrawal From the Study form are in Appendix 111 and 1V respectively.

## Listening for Meaning

In each case I commenced the interview by inviting the narrator to share with me the circumstances under which she commenced calypso singing. I discovered that my earlier diffidence about the narrators' reactions to my questions was unwarranted, as we quickly established what was to my way of thinking, the "correct rapport". Mishler suggests that "if we wish to hear respondents' stories, then we must invite

them into our work as collaborators, sharing control with them, so that together we try to understand what their stories are about" (1986:249). Following this line of reasoning, I decided to respect the ways in which the women determined the shape they gave to their lives as female calypsonians. As a result, although I did not allow the interviews to go "off-track", I tried not to exert undue control over the process, so that the narrators were not forced to follow a set path. In the resulting conversation, the narratives flowed in the direction mapped out by the narrator rather than by me, while remaining relevant to the main objectives of the research. This meant that questions did not follow a specific sequence but were rather part of what Whyte (1982) refers to as a "flexibly structured" interview format in which conversation flows naturally with the researcher alert and able to recognize statements which may suggest new questions.

There were some occasions on which respondents gave long, storied responses to questions and when this occurred, I did not discourage it. In most cases, the entire process lasted for an hour, including the "getting acquainted" session.

## The Personal Diary

The value of field notes for documenting interpretive comments based on researcher perceptions are noted by several writers (Berg 1989; Bogdan 1972; Goetz and LeCompte 1988). I found it expedient to use a personal diary to record my impressions of phenomena that I felt would help me appreciate the dynamics of the research process. At first, I started to scribble notes during and immediately after the interview, but I found that this was unsatisfactory. The former approach distracted

me from the matter at hand, and the latter was not always convenient. In the end, I resorted to writing the diary at the end of the day, but there were a few occasions on which there was a lapse of two or three days.

## Processing the Data

This task turned out to be one of the most difficult for me. Transcribing the audiotapes proved to be very time consuming and took more time than I had anticipated. The data provided by the key informants was relatively easy to transcribe. However, when it came to the data generated by the respondents, I found that I had to go over some sections of the audiotapes in a very painstaking manner because, unnoticed by me during the interviews, respondents had spoken in low tones or because they had used a phrase or a word which had such a special nuance that it took me some time to understand what it was.

## Analyzing the Data

My commitment to the narrative approach led me to a difficulty that I had not fully appreciated prior to the completion of the exercise, which was whether I was going to hear and present the voices as individual outpourings or whether I was going to assemble a multi-layered collage out of which the main elements would extrude. I looked to some of the literature on narrative analysis for guidance. Agar (1980) argues that the type of data produced from research of this nature is usually an elaborate, connected piece of talk presented in a social situation consisting of the narrator and the researcher. As such, "its analysis can profitably draw from a variety of theoretical traditions that deal with this type of data" (1980:223). The difficulty

with this approach is the number of such traditions which are available. These include pragmatics, story structure, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis in linguistics. I looked further, to Polkinghorne (1988) who indicates that because of the dynamics of the interview situation, understood as a discourse situation, the gathering of narrative statements through interviews needs to be followed by an analysis that includes not only the answers of the respondents but also the characteristics of the interview situation (1988:164). On the other hand, Buker (1987) refers to the semiotic approach, in which personal narratives not only refer to events but also constitute reflections about the events themselves. In this sense, a story is a concrete statement about an event as well as an abstract philosophical explanation about the human condition and what events one might expect. Thus, the structural analysis offers a method for interpreting narratives. The "general discourse processing model" suggested by van Dijk offered rich possibilities. In his model van Dijk relies on particular features in the discourse and leans toward culturally and contextually grounded "scripts," "frames," "schemata," and "themes."

Faced with these imposing alternatives, I decided to start the process by immersing myself in the data, reading the transcripts of the conversations several times, listening to the audiotapes and reviewing the notes in my personal diary. As I read and listened, my purpose was to discern narrative structures as well as themes, looking for oppositions and/or contradictions where these were applicable, all the while seeking to explicate and shape the emerging meanings. I discovered that there

were times when I had to step back from the process, if only to get a clearer picture of what was unfolding.

Before I had gone very far, I realized that I had underestimated the volume of data which had been generated from the interviews. Preserving the integrity and richness of the women's responses, consumed more time than I had anticipated, yet it was necessary. After multiple readings of the material I began to extract similar themes, phrase and issues, placing them into appropriate files and against the names of the respective narrators. There were occasions when the narrative seemed to fit more than one category, in which case I put them into the respective categories until further investigation. This approach was time-consuming, but it paid dividends, as through these efforts I became so familiar with the data that it facilitated the recognition of themes and the ability to relate them to one another.

The only time a difficulty arose was when I was listening to the data from the four women who were interviewed together. As I have indicated earlier, the interview location was not the most propitious for the purpose and when each woman was narrating her own story, the problem was not significant. However, as they began talking across each other, each filling a bit of the collective story as she saw it, the problem was magnified, with the result that I had to listen carefully and over and over again to ensure that I was attributing the narrative to the correct source. It was an exhilarating experience beneficial to the advancement of the project.

## Ethical Issues

Methods used in social science research have led in recent years to moral uncertainty about the rights and obligations of both research subjects and investigators. More often than not the controversies turn on the consequences of the research and on whether or not the topics, methods and results are harmful to respondents. In this study, there were no physical risks to the respondents and prior to embarking on the exercise, I obtained the permission of the Ethical Review Committee of the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Alberta. to conduct the research.

Beauchamp et al. assert that the informed consent form has been developed as a means of ensuring that potential participants in a research project are given an opportunity to assess the methods, risks and to decide on that basis whether to proceed (1982:28). I therefore arrived in the field armed with the requisite informed consent and withdrawal- from- the- study forms and carefully explained the nature and scope of the inquiry the respondents before obtaining their written consents to proceed. Two narrators were under the age of 18 and adjudged to be minors. In these cases, I adopted a different approach from that used with the adult participants. In the first situation, the interview was conducted at the school that the narrator attends and the implications of the research were explained to her in the presence of the principal of the school and the school's guidance officer, who also witnessed the signing of the informed consent and withdrawal from the study forms. In the other case, I had gone to the home of the respondent to arrange the details

of the interview and had met her father, to whom I explained the nature of the study and obtained his permission for his daughter to participate. In the single case where the interview was conducted by telephone, the forms were posted to the respondent after prior discussion on the matter.

Babbie (1989) suggests that social research often requires that people reveal information about themselves - information that may be unknown to their friends and associates. I felt constrained to explain to the respondents that the interview would not remain a private conversation, in the sense that the final document would be accessible to others. I once more stressed that they had the right not only to refuse to answer any questions with which they did not feel comfortable, but also to withdraw from the study at any point. Most of the narrators said that they had no problem with divulging information since most of what they were going to tell me was known in some form by other persons.

Since I was collecting information from identifiable persons, anonymity was impossible. I did however undertake to maintain confidentiality of the data and each narrator was given an assumed name for the purposes of the study. At the same time, before completing the final the document, I tried to contact as many of the women as possible in order to get their views on how faithfully I had presented their words. I was able to see three of the women in person and I sent samples of the interviews to the others. The only feedback that I received was from the women whom I saw, since interpretive conflict or "that's not what I said" is one of the major pitfalls a researcher faces in research of this nature. In each case the narrator asserted that she

was satisfied with what I had written, both in terms of the actual words and the interpretation. However, in one instance I was obliged to change the name which I had assigned to the narrator in favour of one which she liked better.

# CHAPTER V: THE SETTING

To provide a better appreciation of this study, a brief insight into the setting is provided. This includes the geographical background, the historical development and the social and cultural legacies. Profiles of the research sites are outlined to help the reader to visualize more clearly what Lieber calls the "sociohistorical amalgam that accounts for the distinctiveness of the Caribbean ambience" (1981:1).

## Geographical Background

The countries of the Caribbean consist of Hispanic, Dutch, Francophone and Anglo-Saxon culture, reflecting the incursion of the European powers into the region in the 15th century. All the Hispanic, most of the Dutch and all but one British territory have achieved political independence. The countries of the Francophone Caribbean except Haiti, remain politically the ward of their mother country, but it has been argued that in yearning for what they see as their Caribbean reality they poignantly express the "reassurance of negritude as well-spring for poetic expression and political consciousness" (Cesaire 1966).

The Anglo-Saxon territories, more familiarly referred to in contemporary terms as the Commonwealth Caribbean, consist of Jamaica, the Leeward Islands (Antigua and Barbuda, the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, St. Christopher and Nevis), the Windward Islands (Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines), Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize in Central America and Guyana in South America. Except for the last two, these territories are islands in the Antillean archipelago and vary significantly in size of land and of population, ranging

from Jamaica with an area of 4,244 square miles and a population of two and a half million to Montserrat with an area of 16 square miles and a population of ten thousand. Despite these physical and demographic disparities and the distances that separate some of them (Jamaica is over a thousand miles north of Trinidad and Tobago), these countries have much in common. A map of the Caribbean area is in Appendix V.

## Historical Development

Historically the development of the region may be conveniently divided into three distinct periods: the first follows immediately after the arrival of the first Europeans and covers the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the second is the post-emancipation period, which is to say, the period following the abolition of slavery in 1833, and the third is the post-independence period, which occurred from the 1960s and onwards.

However, the history of the region did not commence with the arrival of the Europeans, as prior to the arrival of the European colonists, the native people of the Caribbean and of North and South America were Indians, including the Aztecs, the Maya and the Incas who dwelt in these territories for hundreds of years, undisturbed by outsiders. Although the violent colonization process that was instigated by Europeans contributed to the eventual demise of many of these people and/or their acculturation, the archaeological legacies indicate the impressiveness and distinctiveness of their cultures.

The main tribes in the Caribbean archipelago were Arawaks and Caribs who had resided in the area for centuries in undisturbed, if not so peaceful co-existence. The former inhabited the larger islands and were known for their skill as seamen who depended on fishing as the main means of sustaining a livelihood, and who, according to Augier et al. (1960) "did not seem to have spent their energies in perfecting weapons of war, but were not meek or helpless." The Caribs on the other hand, who were also skilled seamen and who took great pride in physical appearance, were of a bellicose nature and were rumoured to be cannibals.

At the end of the 15th century, the way of life of these early inhabitants changed irrevocably, mainly as a consequence of the interest generated in the Region by Europeans who were preoccupied with finding a sea route to Asia. History records that the principal reason for this interest was the fact that each European nation, continually seeking commercial supremacy, wanted to increase its trade with India and China. Land connections to these countries were not only arduous but also hazardous as many traders fell prey to brigands who infested the trade routes. There was also the problem of tropical diseases such as malaria.

It was therefore "the age of discovery" that led to "voyages of discovery" which resulted in the exploration of new lands, the arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean, and the subsequent settlement and conquest of these territories by the Spaniards. It was the Arawaks who felt the first force of the Europeans invasion and although they along with the Caribs, put up fierce resistance to the European invaders for

many years, in the end the superior weaponry of the pillagers won out, and a new chapter in the history of the region began.

Spain's colonization of the West Indies and the wealth that Spain was able to garner from her recently acquired possessions, incurred not only the jealousy but also the wrath of other European nations, notably the French, Dutch and English who recognized that Spain was using this new-found wealth to finance her wars against them in Europe. As a result, attacks by these nations on the Spanish isles coupled with inter-nation warfare in Europe, resulted in the fact that many of the countries that now comprise the Commonwealth Caribbean were at one time or another in their historical development possessions of Spain, France or Holland. These "treasure islands" or "precious gems in the crown of trade" as the colonies were variously described were considered valuable adjuncts to the mother countries.

In the age of 17th century mercantilism, the colonies provided the mother countries with foodstuff and other "exotic" products that could not grow or were not available in the cold climates of the north: products such as rice, tea, coffee, cocoa, cotton, tobacco, dyes and timber. The colonies also provided raw material for manufacture. It was an era in which fortunes were made and lost with great rapidity. Yet it was the introduction of sugar cane production that provided the greatest change in the historical development of the Region, and perhaps the most traumatic. The importance of sugar and the patterns of its consumption at that time are noted by Sheridan:

> Sugar had been classified with such luxuries as spices and silk. For many centuries it was regarded as a superfluity, a rare and costly addition to the ordinary diet and highly regarded for its medicinal properties. Except for the privileged few, honey was the only sweetening in use throughout Europe. (1974:30)

The demand for sugar in Europe caused a revolutionary change and one of great importance to agricultural production in the West Indies. It ushered in what has been described as "the sugar revolution of the 1640s and the 1650s" which not only generated new prosperity but also an influx of new settlers from Europe. The labour-intensive nature of sugar cane cultivation and the resulting imperatives for a large, physically able and compliant labour force, played a not inconsequential role in the rise of the nefarious trading of slaves from Africa and the meteoric rise of the plantation system. Mintz affirms that:

> Viewed from the perspective of post-Roman European history, the [sugar] plantation was an absolutely unprecedented social, economic, and intensely political institution, and by no means simply an innovation in the organizations of agriculture. (1964:xiv)

In one of the most serious indictments of the slave trade and the ways in which Europe underdeveloped Africa through the slave trade, Rodney comments:

> When one tries to measure the effect of European slave trading on the African continent, it is essential to realize that one is measuring the effect of social violence rather than trade in any normal sense of the word...the general picture of destructiveness is clear... [and] the massive loss to the African labor force was made more critical because it was composed of able-bodied young men and women. (1972:96)

The deleterious effects of this trade on the social and economic systems of the Caribbean have been well documented by economists, historians, and sociologists alike (Lewis 1968; Patterson 1967; Rodney 1972; Sheridan 1974; Smith 1974; Thomas

1974; Williams 1964). Noting the impact of this system on Jamaica in particular but speaking for the other territories as well, Patterson observes:

> Jamaica, and the other West Indian Islands, are unique in World history in that they represent one of the rare cases of a human society being artificially created for the satisfaction of one clearly defined goal: that of making money through the production of sugar. (1967:9)

Expressing similar views, Lewis posits that "Caribbean history throughout has been first, the history of European imperialism and, second, the history of slavery" (1968:49).

Continuous objections to the slave trade and slavery by religious and humanitarian groups, were coupled with rumblings on the economic plane, where there was increasing awareness of the unprofitability of sugar production and its declining importance to the metropolitan economies. Meanwhile at the political level, the agitation for emancipation was part of the general movement of the European industrial proletariat towards democracy. The convergence of these factors culminated in the passing of the Emancipation Act in August 1833 which stipulated that slavery in the British colonies was to be abolished with effect from 1st August 1834.

The emancipation of slaves by no means signalled the end of the metropolitan stranglehold on the territories which continued their development as colonies of Britain for just over a century until the emergence of national societies in the 1960s. By the end of 1980 all of the former British possessions with the exception of Montserrat, had achieved constitutional independence, but they have been left a legacy of economic, social and psychological dependency. In many ways they have

not achieved what Beckford refers to as "real political independence with the ability and power to control and manipulate the environment for the benefit of the people of the independent state" (1972:5).

## The Economic Legacy

It has been established that in spite of variations which occurred from island to island, the characteristic West Indian economy in the first period of its historical development was one in which the extensive sugar plantation was worked by forced labour under European supervision for the ultimate benefit of an absentee ownership, a classic combination of white capital and coloured labour. Thus, although *de jure,* the period immediately after emancipation saw the end of the tyranny of master over slave, it did not *de facto* end the continuing economic control of the old planter oligarchy. This state of affairs continued to hold its monopoly of the choice lands of the old plantation economy. As Lewis notes, "the economic history of this period is in large part a history of the social civil war between planters and peasants for control of the land" (1980:223). It was a long struggle which the peasants eventually lost.

The general euphoria which greeted the severing of ties from "mother" Britain, accompanied by the rhetoric of politicians of the day, instilled in the new nations confidence that they could chart their way successfully in the rough seas that lay ahead. Yet it has become evident that the constitutional independence which most of the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean received within the last 35 years

has not been accompanied by significant economic change and they remain for the most part a passive element in the international capitalist system.

Although a few economies continue to grow and diversify, the character of the economic change does not signify a release from the "stranglehold of dependence." Inflation rates have risen enormously and the external debt has reached a critical level in many of the countries forcing them to seek economic recovery by resorting to the world financial institutions for assistance. It is not a society that is highly industrialized and the region provides mainly natural resources and labour.

Although most people see the region's shortcomings in economic performance as a direct consequence of the dependency syndrome which has been mentioned, Demas traces the difficulty, in part, to a "people" problem and argues:

> There is a widespread phenomenon within West Indian societies, that is, the failure as a people to reconstruct the weak and distorted economic structures bequeathed to them by centuries of colonialism. (1990:16)

However, Thomas points out that in those societies where radical options in the economies were attempted, there was, essentially, no transformation because of the weaknesses of the governments taking strategies on behalf of the poor (Thomas 1988). In discussing the process of Caribbean development which has produced poverty and powerlessness, he observes:

> ...plans that are introduced for the transformation of the [Caribbean] Region, will have to speak a good deal more to the issue of empowerment from below... institutions which seek to empower people from below, to impose their own logic and determination and decision-making on the structures of authority have not developed enough. (1988:17)

The situation in brief, is that the Caribbean today is seen in the economic context of a relatively underdeveloped group of countries whose economies are still displaying a high degree of dependence on the metropolitan economy for trade, capital, technology and management.

## The Social Legacy

### Social Stratification

In introducing their work on Consequences of Class and Color in the West Indies, Lowenthal and Comitas submit that "the foundation of the West Indian social order on a colonial class-color hierarchy has given rise to racial stress and pervasive stereotypes"(1973:xv). Commenting on the nature of the society, Smith notes that it was developed through:

> The common historical patterns of conquest, colonization, peonage or slavery, and the development of multi-racial and multi-cultural societies throughout this area. (1965:50)

It is generally acknowledged that the social stratification which is still an integral part of the Caribbean society is not only intricately bound up with, but cannot be separated from, its historical and economic development. In structural terms, the West Indian society of the immediate post-emancipation era was a highly stratified one, which according to Lewis was "based primarily on class oppression and paternalism, whether within or outside of the graded culture-class hierarchies" (1968:83). There was little variation in the situation in later years and this has prompted Lowenthal to note:

> The West Indian class hierarchy is steeply stratified; differences between classes are profound; contacts across class lines are restricted. The association of colour with class intensifies awareness of, and adherence to, the differences...Neither ancestry nor appearance is wholly determinative in the West Indies; one changes colour be acquiring education, manners, wealth, associates. (1972: 135)

Well into the 20th century, the basic structure of the society still turned on the twin lodestars of race and class and investigations of social stratification in the Caribbean showed that race, colour and education remained important variables in respect of occupational choice and social position (Brathwaite 1971; Hoetink 1985; James 1962; Lowenthal 1972; Nettleford 1965; Skinner 1971; Smith 1982). Nonetheless, as both Smith and Lowenthal agree, there exist variations and exceptions to the composite picture and there are a few "homogeneous societies" without much distinction as to class, colour or culture, "societies differentiated by colour but not by class" and "societies lacking white Creole elites" (1972:76-87).

## Ethnic Diversity

To a greater or lesser extent, depending on the countries involved, the ethnic composition of the region still reflects in many ways the basic pattern which evolved during the plantation era. But the evolution of this ethnic mosaic came in stages; first there were the original Amerindian inhabitants who were followed by the white planters and their white indentured servants. The African slave trade which resulted in the influx of a large African population and the carefully calculated importation of indentured immigrants from Asia to replace the labour lost as a result of emancipation, and last, the formation of new groups through ethnic blending, completed the "black-brown-white triangle of human types" (Lewis 1980). The

mulatto or coloured group which was formed as a result of successive European and African admixtures was regarded as an important link in the social structure.

In the Caribbean as a whole, the Negro and East Indian population make up the largest ethnic groups, but the two groups are not evenly distributed in all of the territories. Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago are distinguished from other areas by a heavy concentration of East Indians, although there are also sizeable East Indian populations in Jamaica and Grenada. It is generally acknowledged that the large numbers of this ethnic group is a direct consequence of the large-scale importation of indentured immigrants which was undertaken to offset the impact of the abolition of slavery on the labour market (Brathwaite 1956; Crowley 1960; Smith 1974).

The East Indians, who are predominantly Hindus, brought with them their religious and cultural practices, which, unlike the African slaves, they were allowed to practice freely. The diversity of their culture is reflected in the family system, music, dances, food and the various purificatory and social practices associated with religious traditions. Although shifts in social and cultural mores have contributed to changes in this pattern, for a long time the typical East Indian family structure was one in which the joint family system was developed as a result of inter-marriages among immigrants and the growth of individual families. Every joint family was headed by the father, or in his absence, the elder brother, while all the brothers would pool resources to run the household and build the family property.

For women especially the family system was important, since after marriage the daughters- in-law would become a part of the joint family system. However, while the daughter-in-law usually joined their in-laws, it was not unusual to find married daughters and their families living with the father and brothers. At the same time, although outwardly subservient, the East Indian woman's role in the household was seen as a powerful one. In Table 4 the ethnic distribution of the population groups is outlined.

Table 4: Ethnic distribution of population in six selected Commonwealth Caribbean Countries.[7]

| Country | Total Population | Ethnic Composition % | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Black | E. Indian | Mixed | White | Other |
| Antigua & Barbuda | 64,000 | 94.0 | --- | 5.0 | 1.0 | --- |
| Barbados | 259,000 | 80.0 | --- | 16.0 | 4.0 | --- |
| Guyana | 748,000 | 30.5 | 51.4 | 7.1 | 1.0 | --- |
| Jamaica | 2,445,000 | 76.7 | 1.3 | 19.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| Saint Lucia | 135,000 | 87.0 | 2.6 | 9.1 | 1.3 | --- |
| Trinidad & Tobago | 1,261,000 | 43.0 | 36.0 | 16.0 | 2.0 | --- |

Source: 1993 Britannica Book of the Year. Encyclopedia Britannica Inc: Chicago.

## Education

Educational development in the Caribbean is in many respects correlated with the region's historical and social development. During the period preceding emancipation, slaves were at the lowest level of the social ladder, and education or

the lack thereof, was used by slave owners to keep slaves in this "assigned" place in the social hierarchy. Slaves and children of slaves received practically no education, primarily because of the view that "an educated slave was a dangerous slave" and further, that there was no need to teach slaves since most of the tasks done by them required no mental effort. Attempts were made to thwart the endeavours of those slaves who wanted to educate themselves or to be furthered in their ambitions for knowledge through the help of white philanthropists or humanitarians.

Education was provided only for the children of the white planter class and on occasion for the mulatto off-spring of planters and the female slaves. In many cases, this meant that private tutors were engaged for these children, or else they were sent "back home" to Europe to be schooled. The smattering of education which the slaves did receive was as a result of missionary activity but for the most part this was because of the latter's determination to "civilize the negroes and enlighten their benighted souls". It was an activity which was not greeted with enthusiasm by members of the plantocracy and it was an attitude which prompted some persons to refer to them as a "negrophobic plantocracy."

Bacchus indicates that he [the slave] was trained in the belief that he was an inferior being and the various laws passed to ensure the provision of some religious education were usually ignored by most planters. Describing this situation, Bacchus notes:

> Very few local educational facilities were available to children of the free blacks [in the West Indies] especially since they did not have fathers wealthy enough to provide them with opportunities to attend good schools at home or abroad. Whenever these children obtained

> an education, it was likely to have been through their parents' efforts, sometimes with the assistance of religious bodies. In the case of the slaves, the situation was even more serious since their intellectual and spiritual development was almost entirely neglected because of the sugar planters' opposition to such efforts. (1990: 95)

A feeble attempt to rectify this system was made through the Negro Education Grant of 1834 through which the British Government offered a sum of money from 1835 until 1840 for the education of ex-slaves. Indeed, the social and economic changes which succeeded emancipation saw few attendant changes and expansion in the education systems of the region, a situation which prompts Lowenthal (1972) to argue that educational patterns continued to reflect, validate and reinforce class differences in the society and that dissimilar systems of education developed, for the elite and rising middle class and for the masses. It has been contended that the content and orientation of education remained colonial until well into the 1960s (Bacchus 1990; Beckford 1980; Figueroa 1971; Lowenthal 1972; Naipaul 1963). Therefore it was not until during the late 1960s and 1970s as independence became a reality for most of the countries of the Caribbean and as the need for more self-sufficiency in the work force became a priority, that activities designed to promote equal educational opportunity gained pre-eminence and there was a consolidated attempt to develop educational systems that were more oriented to the needs of the region. Although this did not completely eradicate elitism in the education system, one of the most important aspects of this development was the fact that ability rather than class and status started to emerge as the determining factor in access to education.

As the region is preparing to enter the 21st century, the educational scene is cause for cautious optimism, despite the constraints caused by economic recession. Most indicators of education place the majority of Caribbean countries well above the average for all countries at similar levels of economic development.[8] Primary schooling is nearly universal, enrollment ratios for preschool and secondary education generally are above average for the middle income countries and overall literacy rates are high. At the tertiary level, institutions offer full and part-time enrollment in teacher education, technical-vocational programmes in community colleges, teachers' colleges, and technical institutes. University education is provided in the main by two regional institutions, the University of the West Indies, established in 1948, and the University of Guyana, launched in 1962.

## The Cultural Legacy

Comitas, in emphasizing the cultural consequences of the "importation" of slaves from Africa and the "immigration" of labourers from Asia claims:

> The cultural inventories of each island, except for Barbados, have been modified, disrupted and changed by the all-too frequent substitution of one European power for another during a period of ferment that lasted well into the 19th century. (1960:809)

Certainly, the legacy which the region has inherited is reflected in every aspect of its culture: language, literature, the arts, cuisine. Still, it can be argued that it is the very diverse origins of its populations, the complicated history of European cultural impositions, and the absence in most of the territories of any firm continuity of the culture of the colonial power that have resulted in the heterogeneous cultural picture of which the Caribbean boasts today. The Report of the West Indian Commission in

1992 describes the situation thus:

> There is something precious which has always distinguished the West Indian from the rest of the international community: if any region on earth has proven that persons of ethnic and cultural heritages can come together to form a whole which is potentially greater that its constituent parts, that region has to be the West Indies or the Caribbean, however defined. To deny or ignore the contribution of all or any of the cosmopolitan Caribbean's peoples whether of preponderantly African, East Indian, European, Chinese or other ancestry, of the indigenous peoples of the region, is to surrender far too easily something however imperfect that the Caribbean has to offer to the family of mankind at large. (1992:7)

## Festivals and Festivities

Perhaps nowhere is the cultural legacy of the region more apparent than in its festivals. In assessing the cultural development of the region, Nunley and Bettelheim postulate that the Caribbean's ethnic complexion, as well as its dynamic economic and political history, are ingredients of its festival arts. They note that "Caribbean festivals embody an aesthetic formality rooted in the early European, African, and Asian traditions brought to the region between the 15th and 19th centuries" (1988:34). Indeed, most of the Caribbean territories display what Lewis refers to as "*un embarrass de richesses*" in respect of popular festivals (1968:29). Nevertheless, there are a number of factors which in each territory determines not only the dates on which these celebrations occur, but also their themes, form and the music they celebrate. These factors include religion and musical tradition. Moreover, many of the festivals are peculiar to individual islands and reflect their historical past as much as their ethnic composition. Thus, there is the Carnival, celebrated in many of the islands where there had been a sustained French and Spanish influence, the

Hosay, a Muslim religious festival, celebrated in those territories where there was a significant Muslim population, the Diwali and Phagwah Hindu festivals, the Saint Lucian Flower Festivals, especially the Fete La Rose and the Fete La Marguerite, the Crop-Over in Barbados, which is traditionally celebrated at the end of the sugar harvest, and the Mashramani in Guyana which marks the country's declaration of republican status. Most of these festivities involve large segments of particular groups, and in the case of the Carnival, the Mashramani and the Crop-over there are calypso competitions, steelband competitions, float parades and costume bands. In Barbados, the major cultural festivals are the Holetown Festival which is held in February and celebrates the landing of the first settlers in Barbados and the Crop-Over. The latter festival is held during the last two weeks of July and showcases *inter alia*, the skills of the islands' musicians, singers and dancers. During this period costume bands take to the streets in carnival-style.

As a result of their ethnic mix, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana have festivals that are Christian, Hindu and Muslim in origin. It is the former country, however which boasts the biggest and most colourful festival in the region: the Carnival which traditionally begins the Saturday before Ash Wednesday and ends at midnight on Shrove Tuesday.

# CHAPTER V1: MUSIC, PERFORMANCE AND VOICE

Narratives of female calypsonians have to be contextualized within the framework of the genre and the woman's place in it. This chapter therefore explores music and performance in respect of the calypso tracing the history and development of the art form, genre, its role and function vis a vis the society and most importantly the ways in which women figure as subject and as performers in the medium.

## Development of a Musical Tradition

An investigation of the calypso, whether as a mode of performance or as an art form should be conducted against the kaleidoscope of the Caribbean cultural scene, in particular its musical tradition, for only then might a meaningful picture emerge. There can be no doubt that the musical forms which are found in the Caribbean today are linked intrinsically to the historical development of the region. Bilby (1985) notes that most Caribbean musical forms, like Caribbean language forms and other aspects of culture, are characterized by a simultaneous newness and oldness, the heritage of a historical process that has come to be known as creolization. Blending occurred not only between European and African traditions but also between the varied traditions of a multitude of African ethnic groups, whose cultures and languages often differed from each other as much as did those of the various European colonizers.

The inhuman and appalling conditions under which slaves in the Caribbean lived and worked and some of the revolts which occurred as a result of these atrocities, have been well documented in the history of the Region. Yet the historical

records also reveal that one of the less obvious ways in which the slaves fought back, was through their music, expressing their resentment, anger and frustration through this medium. As Hebdige affirms:

> ...by remembering African rhythms, the slaves could keep alive the memory of the freedom they had lost. They could keep a part of themselves free from European influence. At the same time, they could adapt European forms of music and dance to suit their needs...As far as the law was concerned, they didn't even own themselves, but they were free to take the master's music. By adding African rhythms they could turn it into something which was exclusively their own. ((1987:36)

The creative process, initiated during the days of slavery continued after emancipation with the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from Asia, with the result that there emerged a Caribbean musical tradition that even today demonstrates a wide range and a great diversity. Every major linguistic sub-region: hispanophone, francophone and anglophone has produced its own peculiar musical form, but at the same time, there are variations within each subset. These include the East Indian *dhrupad* and *thumri*, which are light classical songs, performed primarily in Trinidad with a tempo and rhythm quite peculiar to the Region, the Spanish *parang*, also found in Trinidad, the Jamaican *reggae*, the Guyana *shanto*, and the Caribbean *calypso*, arguably the most ubiquitous of them all.

However, it is interesting to note that although there is evidence that the early Amerindian settlers had their own musical tradition -songs and dances, none of these feature significantly in the repertoire of the Caribbean today.

Origin of the Calypso

The calypso developed early in Trinidad and the developments in the other countries depended on events in Trinidad which has been regarded by some as the repository of immigrants from the surrounding territories. The rest of this chapter will examine the various aspects of the calypso, including its place and function within the Caribbean society and the role of its performers.

What is calypso? Is it a song or is it a dance? Whence did it originate? These are some of the questions which are asked regularly, usually by persons unfamiliar with the genre. Thus, it is not uncommon to hear these persons describe as a calypso any song with strongly stressed rhythm and words sung in a West Indian accent and/or dialect. Yet to those who know better, the calypso represents something that is much more complex in form and structure.

It may be appropriate to start by exploring the origin of the term calypso, theories of which point to an astonishing range of sources, including African, French, Spanish and Carib Indian. Most proponents of the various theories accept, however, that the possibility that the term could be derived from the Homeric island queen of the same name, is unlikely. The majority of these etymological investigations favour an African origin of the term. Hill (1967) concludes that the evidence in support of this theory, though not conclusive, is fairly convincing in the absence of more positive data. The predilection of Hill and others for this hypothesis springs from the acknowledged presence of the word "kaiso", in the Hausa language of a large Nigerian tribe and in several other tribes in the interior of coastal states from Nigeria

to Senegal. The usage of the word in these tribes concerning improvised songs of derision and praise and a similar usage in the calypso further strengthens this hypothesis. On the other hand, Warner-Lewis (1982) identifies certain Yoruba musical traditions in which the disposition to repeat first lines of songs is reflected in the stanza structure of some of the earlier calypsos and even some contemporary ones.

Other possibilities are noted by Crowley: the French creole word *cariso*, which was a derivation of a French word for carousing, the Spanish *caliso*, which was an old Venezuelan-Spanish term for a local song sung by inhabitants along the Spanish Main; *carieto*, a Carib Indian term for "a joyous song used to heal the sick, to embolden the warrior, and to seduce the fair" (1959:59-60). Today "kaiso" and "calypso" are both used to denote the art form but as Rohlehr (1969) instructs, conflicts about lineage were not restricted to the derivation of the name, as there are also different claims made for African, French and Spanish parentage of the music and rhythm.

Although the reputation of the calypso owes as much to its lyrics as to its rhythmic musical accompaniment, the purists assert that it has specific characteristics that serve to reveal its distinctive nature. Some of these identifiable characteristics are described by Quevedo:

> In kaiso, two basic verse or stanza forms are identifiable. They are known traditionally in kaiso parlance as the "single tone" and the "double tone". The single tone is comprised of four-line stanzas while the double tone consists of eight-line stanzas. Traditionally, the lyrical
>
> style of the single tone is epigrammatic and has been the ideal dress

> for the "picong" kaiso in which spontaneous wit, humour, scorn and ridicule of men and matters may together or alternately be deployed. (1983:2)

## Calypso as Voice

Elder (1986) notes that apart from its numerous melodic forms and its peculiar performance techniques, the calypso stands apart on its topicality, its *double entendre* and its innuendo so baffling to the non-Trinidadian, but above all on its vicious satirical *picong* as satire is called in Trinidad. It is "a song of the people, a popular art-form that has persisted through two centuries as a medium of expression for the many groups who, thrown together in a new land, have struggled and fought for political liberty" (1986:1). Warner argues that if we redefine the term "literature" to include non-scribal material which is not only more relevant to the majority of the people [of the of Caribbean] but which has unquestionably wider provenance, then the calypso is part of this folk/oral literary tradition (1982:3). Carrying through with this concept of orality, Rohlehr concludes that "the calypso is an extension of orality in the Caribbean, most of which comes from practices that were and are still traditional in West Africa.[9]

The calypso is an art form which grew out of the folk tradition and an impulse toward rebellion, so that from its earliest days it contained a large element of social complaint against inhuman conditions and treatment. As Naipaul notes "the calypso deals with local incidents, local attitudes, and it does so in a local language" (1962:70). Through the voice of its performers, it has developed and executes the functions of entertainment, celebration, protest, social control, satire, and the passing

on of moral instruction. Other functions include defiance, and incitement of people to battle in a figurative if not literal sense.

In this melange, the calypso provides the space and scope for nearly every other art form, so that if we put together all the elements of the calypso - the language, the drama, the music, the poetry, the associated dance and spectacle- we have what may be regarded as the art form, *par excellence*, of the Caribbean and the calypsonian becomes the consummate artist.

However, in order to fully understand the role which calypso and its performers play in Caribbean culture and society, it is necessary to examine how and why the genre itself developed, the ways in which it made its mark on the society and how in turn by social comment, the weaknesses and foibles of the society are held up for inspection through the calypso.

## Historical and Social Development

### The Kalinda

Although calypso is now sung in most of the Caribbean, including some of the non-anglophone territories, most historians agree that the longest tradition exists in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is to that country that we must look for an investigation into the history of the genre. Elder discloses that the linear ancestor of the calypso is the *kalinda*, "an ancient duelling-song for the game called by the French *bois-bataille* (stick fight) which the Negroes engaged in during the rest periods on the estates, at evenings in the backyards, or publicly on holidays like Easter Monday and Christmas Day" (1986:3). The stick fighting was a highly ritualized, male, martial

activity in which the stick fighter, like the old epic Anglo-Saxon hero, was required before fighting to tell his opponent what dire injury he planned to do to him. Rohlehr (1969) is of the view that in the case of the stick-fighter, it was no mere pose, but had its roots in magic. Thus, the stick fighter, by boasting of his power, attempted to gain possession of it, and by proclaiming his invincibility before the fight, he sought immunity in the very words that he used. Rohlehr writes:

> It was a serious rhetoric, a formalized almost religious sort of boasting prelude in which manhood, status, identity within the group, sometimes even life were at stake. (1968: 8)

For many years after emancipation the Negroes celebrated the anniversary of their freedom on August day by marching in organized bands in the streets and singing kalinda songs. These boastful, demonstrative songs were sung by the leader or champion who developed a following of persons each armed with lethal-looking battling sticks and a supporting chorus, with a lead singer or chantwell who sounded the refrain to the kalinda songs, urging the leader on to better and fiercer exploits. Crowley (1959) imparts that while stickfighting sometimes developed into a duel to the death, it was more often limited to damage of clothing, or a bloodied head. Accounts of the kalinda emphasize its high level of ritualization (Elder 1971; Rohlehr 1990). Rohlehr comments on the way each major band had its own frontiers and boundaries which it was forbidden to cross at any time of the year; the sense of decorum; the absorption of several romantic/chivalric/aristocratic elements such as heroic boasting, which is simultaneously African and European. He also refers to the splendour and richness of the costumes of the champions (1990:15).

The pageant of *Cannes Brulees* named in memory of the slavery days cane fires and celebrated by bands parading around the city of Port-of- Spain, served as an excellent vehicle for the stick fighting and kalinda performances. The spectacle is described by Elder thus:

> The celebrating bands were each headed by a mock King, a Queen, several princesses, and a galaxy of royal imitators. The champion of each band walked ahead singing boastful kalinda songs about himself and the victories and conquests of his followers. The bands were organized on parochial lines and very often clashed with rival bands which refused to recognize their supremacy. Often, however, there was no free-for all, the two leaders would close in to do battle with each other. (1971:317)

Rohlehr (1990) relates a similar account of this pageantry which was played out between bands:

> On meeting his opponent, the Pierrot (king) would deliver a wonderful oration, dwelling principally on his powers, his invincibility and the dire things in store for his enemy. The "enemy king" was entitled, of course, to reply which he did by impressing the first speaker that he would conquer him, overrunning his dominions, and in a word utterly annihilate him. (1990:53)

In the early post-emancipation days, this revelry took place on August 1 of every year, to mark the anniversary of freedom. Gradually, this date was switched to coincide with the Mardi Gras celebrations which were celebrated by the plantocracy.

Resentment by the upper class at this incursion into the elegance of their festivities, resulted in the enactment of stringent laws aimed at "putting down this ribald Negro saturnalia once and for all in Trinidad" (Elder 1971:318). Not surprisingly perhaps, the harsh laws against the *Cannes Brulees* did not have the intended effect as the masses saw this as yet another attempt at reinforcing class

distinctions and, ironically, the mulattos supported the Negroes in their resistance to the laws.

## Conflict in Performance

Matters came to a head in 1881, when there was a serious clash between the police and revellers of the *Cannes Brulee*s resulting in mortality on both sides. This was an important chapter in the history of the calypso because the suppression of the kalinda was now rigidly pursued, although in actual fact it was only enforceable in the urban and semi-urban districts and continued unabated in the rural districts. The kalinda became an underground movement and its attendant practices continued.

Historians note that during the latter part of the 19th century and on to 1920, the kalinda flourished and its gradual evolution to calypso continued, although the lines of demarcation between the two streams were still blurred. Elder states that "the musical instruments used for calypso singing on street parades continued to be the drums, but by 1901 the tamboo-bamboo was substituted for the bass, while the bottle-and-spoon carried the melody. The music was still largely choral and the accompaniment predominantly percussional" (1971:7).

In the 1930s the calypso began to run into trouble with the elite class just as the kalinda had done. This was because calypsonians were seizing the opportunity to openly criticize the upper class and took satire and derision to new heights of expression in their songs. However, attempts to legislate the calypso out of existence were unsuccessful and the tradition survived yet another storming of its ramparts and has survived to the present day.

## The Calypso Tent

The calypso is a particularly interactive mode, and the often fierce interplay between performer and audience is one of the oldest traditions in calypso. One of the ways in which this is manifested is at the calypso tent. According to Elder, a French aristocrat by the name of Le Blanc, set up the first calypso tent in 1899, to which he "invited Negro singers to compose kalinda songs" (1971:319). The intention was to "divorce the calypso from its kalinda/stickfighting roots by disqualifying tamboo-bamboo and bottle-and-spoon accompaniment from consideration as musical instruments" (Rohlehr 1990: 110). As the practice caught on, it became an established practice in the weeks before the Carnival for masquerade bands to assemble at night in backyard tents and rehearse their calypso choruses. These early calypso tents were temporary structures built of bamboo and covered with a tarpaulin. Lighting was by means of kerosene lamps. and calypsonians sang from the floor of the tent, almost totally surrounded by the audience, which was seated on rough bamboo benches which lounged around the sides of the enclosure (Warner 1982:11). As time went on, more and more people went to the tent practices "to get a foretaste of the new songs and to enjoy an evening of native wit and spicy humour" (1982:11). Before long, the tent began to evolve into a milieu where calypsonians could vent their attacks on politicians, government officials and perceived social ills of the day. Rohlehr notes that "the tents of the twenties developed under the patronage of the middle class professional men, some of whom were believed to be attracted to the lower class women who frequented the tents. These "jacket men" fed their favourite

singers with the latest scandals from their world, which the calypsonians would then convert into calypsos (1990: 89 ). Although the bamboo structures are long gone, to be replaced by a variety of permanent buildings, including cinemas and a variety of halls, the term "tent" and its main traditions have persisted. Patrons now pay a fee for the privilege of hearing their favourite calypsonians ridicule each other, the politicians or just anyone who is fair play. It is now customary for each tent to have a "principal" calypsonian who is the main drawing card and several "junior" calypsonians who hope that the exposure will launch them into prominence. It is not a place for the timid or the puritanical. In an analysis of the calypso as a mass communication medium, Lashley (1982) finds that the majority of patrons visit the calypso tents primarily to be entertained, but that the non-patrons absent themselves because there is a tension between the fairness of the messages expressed for family consumption and for reception by people of various religious persuasions. It is an atmosphere which is charged, as we see from Warner's description of the tent:

> The atmosphere is one of *laissez-aller* and "fatigue" or heckling. The more popular tents attract so many patrons and the latter are forced to be in their seats so early that the audience as a whole is looking for the slightest pretext to let off steam, either in its enthusiastic approval of a number or in its vociferous rejection of a mediocre performance. (1982:12)

The crucial link between the audience and the calypsonian is the Master of Ceremonies, who is usually a calypsonian. His main task is to introduce the singers and to put the audience in a proper frame of mind with a blend of verbal acrobatics, interspersed with jokes and heckling. The tent audience, having come to hear the risque songs that are not aired on radio, and which may not always be available on

record, "expects some degree of spicy patter from the Master of Ceremonies and the jokes between the numbers must keep the tone" (Warner 1982:13).

Behind the entertainment on stage is a serious business enterprise. Each tent has a manager, who need not be a calypsonian, but whose business acumen must include the ability to recognize good calypsonians and calypsos and thus book them to appear in the tent. Charisma and negotiating skills that will ensure continued sponsorship for the tent and its artistes and the deftness to "keep things together" are also the attributes of an effective tent manager.

We must now turn our attention to the Carnival which most calypso historians agree has developed synchronously with calypso. Indeed, the calypso can be considered the accompanying *leitmotif* of the carnival, with the two being linked inseparably as calypso music provided the main accompaniment for the Carnival bands (Brereton 1981; Elder 1968; Hylton 1975; Quevedo 1983; Rohlehr 1990; Warner 1982).

## Calypso and Carnival

### Ritual and Reality

The Carnival is considered the major cultural festival of the Caribbean, in the sense that it is celebrated in many territories, although usually the activities are patterned after a Carnival rather than being a carnival *per se*. The traditional Carnival in the Caribbean derives from the blending of European pre-Lenten festivals with

traditional African masquerades and it is celebrated in this traditional manner in most of the Caribbean territories where the French and Spanish influence was predominant in their early development.

However, studies of Carnival and the carnivalesque suggest that the nature of Carnival, whether it is the Carnival of Europe or the festivals of Africa, South America, the Caribbean or North America maintains certain elements. Historians of the genre submit that the Carnival is a festival in which "you become other than you are" (Brereton 1975; DaMatta 1991; Elder 1968; Ladurie 1979; Rohlehr 1990; Warner 1982). First, a space is created within a rigid moral structure and in that space one is given the chance to be the other self which one would not normally get much of a chance to express. Secondly, the rhythm of a Carnival is that it begins with a subversion of morality, it turns things upside down, but then it moves back and reverses what it has overturned, so that the Carnival usually ends with a reaffirmation of normalcy.

DaMatta proposes that the ritual of Carnival is one that gives wings to the social plane and perhaps creates its deepest sense of reality. Defining ritual as a "dialectic between the every day and the extraordinary, with ritual being at the relatively extraordinary pole", he contends that:

> There is no society without an idea of an extraordinary world where deities dwell and where life is lived amid freedom and plenitude. Thus, to perform a ritual is to open this world: giving it reality, creating a space for it, and opening the channels for communication between the "real world" and this special world. It is in ritual that a society moves out of itself and reaches an ambiguous realm where it is not what it is normally, nor what it could be, since ritual is by definition transitory. (1991:22)

## The Importance of the Mask

The mask occupies an important place in the ritual of Carnival. Rohlehr argues that its function is in a sense to hide the faces of those who are breaking the rigid moral code and that "we have the constant problem of reality treated as if it were masquerade, as if by rendering it thus, we are depriving it of its power to damage us".[10] And so, the women who were singing calypso and dancing in the streets, wore their masks and used the space provided to them by the carnival to defy the contempt and disapproval of the society. An example of the fatal turn which this pattern of reversal beneath the mask of the Carnival can play, is demonstrated by Ladurie (1979) in his account of the Carnival in the town of Romans in France during the 16th century, where the conflict between the Catholics and Huguenot Protestants was being played out under the ritual of the carnival, and while the mask worn by the protagonists seemed to be a distortion of reality, the roles were earnestly executed and the result was a terrible massacre.

## Carnival as Theatre of the Streets

The Carnival of Trinidad and Tobago is the supreme example of the genre in the Caribbean and it has become a vehicle for showcasing various elements of the culture of the Region. Like its counterpart in Brazil, where there is a strong Negro presence, but unlike the New Orleans carnival where it was maintained mostly as a European custom, the Trinidad carnival started as the voice of the lower class, that is to say, the emancipated slaves. Unparalleled in its spectacle, it outstrips other celebrations in the shade, a situation which prompts Lewis to observe:

> What passes for Carnival [in other territories] is mostly touristy gimmickry. The Trinidad event, by comparison is a tremendous bacchanalian folk-fiesta drawing its vitality from at once a long historical background and the living processes of contemporary West Indian experience. From its opening moment of *jour ouvert* and the ole mas' costume bands to its finale, forty eight hours later, in the dusk of Mardi Carnival, the Trinidadian populace gives itself up to the "jump up", the tempestuous abandon of Carnival (to use the Anglo-West Indian term) or the Masquerade, the earlier Creole French connotation. The massive spectacle of it all - dance, design, colour-stuns the imagination as much as it exhausts the body, for its essence is participatory movement. (1968:30)

Yet, even to understand this spectacle that West Indian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott (1964) has aptly styled "a theatre of the streets", we must examine the relationship between the spectacle, the society, and the main actors, before and after emancipation and at the present time.

Pre-emancipation Carnival

Before emancipation, Carnival in Trinidad was an elegant, social affair of the White Creole upper class involving masked balls and street promenading featuring the "leaders" of the society (Brereton 1975). Describing the social mores of the times, Borde depicts the French planters of 19th century Trinidad as "a true rural aristocracy who appeared to have been a close-knit group that sought their rewards in their country of adoption, establishing a fairly comfortable standard of living and maintaining *vastes mais modestes manoirs champetres*, usually near rivers, with orchards and pasturage near the house" (Borde 1883, quoted in Pearse 1971). According to Pearse the cordial relations existing between the French plantocracy were "expressed in varied *divertissements*, concerts, balls, dinners, hunting parties and *fetes champetres* and these were especially concentrated into the Carnival season,

which lasted from Christmas to Ash Wednesday". Pearse notes also that "the gatherings of the Carnival season were characterized by contagious gaiety, brilliant verbal sallies, and comic buffoonery" (1971:530). Since the society was subject to a rigid stratification system, with Whites, free persons of colour and slaves in that order, it was not surprising that participation in these Carnival activities was reserved for the privileged white groups.

Post-emancipation Carnival

The passing of the Emancipation Act in 1833 was accompanied by far-reaching changes in the structure of the society that brought about both economic and social changes. In the economic sphere, people were no longer compelled to work on the plantations as slaves, but in the absence of a strong economic base, many of them were forced to continue the same work as paid labourers. Simultaneously, the decline of the old planter class saw the rise of a new class consisting of the creole cultivator and the peasant farmer. The social implications of emancipation were also significant in that the ancient lines of social demarcation were not immediately obliterated and important social cleavages still separated the ordinary folk from the elite.

Thus the participation of the former slaves in Carnival coincided with the withdrawal of the upper and middle classes from the festivities, amid charges that the character and nature of the festival had changed from "an elegant, social affair to a "fete for the underprivileged and black lower classes in which bawdiness became an important element" (Rohlehr 1990). Of special note was the *Jamet* Carnival which brought a totally different element to the nature of the festivities.

Commenting on the drastic change which marked the festival at this time Brereton notes:

> Around the 1860s Carnival came to have a distinctive character of the **diametre** class.[11] The festival was almost entirely taken over by the jamets, who had created in the backyards of Port of Spain, their own sub-culture. At this time, yard hands were formed: groups of men and women, boys and girls who went around together for singing, fighting and dancing. Such bands... were especially active in the weeks before Carnival, when they rehearsed their songs, dances and stick-fighting. (1975:47)

Attempts to impose a total ban on the festivities, because of these excesses, were not met with enthusiasm by members of the upper and middle classes; in any case, they did not succeed, but resulted in a tempering of the activities. Accordingly as time went on, there was a change in the attitude of the coloured middle class in particular and as Powrie observes "the annual two-day festival of Carnival is eagerly looked forward to and ardently entered into by the middle class" (1956:226).

## Modern developments in Calypso and Carnival

Aficionados of the modern day Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago propose that it is the greatest spectacle of its genre in the world, although the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans might put up a spirited argument on that point. Not only is it a massive spectacle as for dance, history and pageantry, but as Lewis notes "merely to observe it, without joining in - as a Barbadian, bereft of the capacity for *fiesta* by his Cromwellian-Puritan background might do, is to miss the sheer madness of it all : the grandeur of it is missed by those who only observe (1968:30). One the most significant features of the modern carnival is the pattern of its activity and participation. Far from being "a fete for the underprivileged and lower classes" the

spirit of Carnival is now entered into by almost all levels of the society. Calypso's folk tradition lies in the fact that it is the music of the people, using the language of the people to reflect the concerns of the people. Today, perhaps like all folk music in the world, the art form has moved and developed in several ways. One of these developments has been a partial movement away from spontaneous folk art, to a movement which is dominated by persons who use the medium as a means of livelihood, and one that requires its performers to compete in the world of the professional. To do this performers have to bring to their performances all that is necessary to "stay in the game".

As a result of these new demands, the modern calypso and calypsonian has to be viewed in a new light. Calypsonians now look to the new technologies, they search for the best accompanist, the best arranger, the best lyricist so that what is ultimately heard is never now the work of any one person. It is the composer, who may be the singer, the musician who suggests a tune and arranges it, and recommends what instrumentation to have, what to do with the drums, the synthesizer. Then there is also the sound engineer, who mixes the entire thing and who may not agree with the arranger.

In a sense, it may be argued that the market determines the emergence of a new form. That emergence may also be determined by other social forces, so that changes in the music are taking place because of changes in social taste. Politicians are now using calypsos to get across the message of their particular party. For example, in the last Trinidad and Tobago elections every political party had its

calypso. Regretfully, there is also a general degeneration of discourse in the calypso as everything seems now to be dictated by market forces. Another noteworthy development is the introduction of new strains: the *soca* which is described as a fusion of "calypso and "soul" music and the *chutney*[12] in which an East Indian song takes on some of the characteristics of the calypso, in particular the rhythm.

## The Calypsonian

### The Legacy

There can be no serious challenge to the claim that it was the early chantwell of kalinda fame who has over the years evolved into the modern calypso singer. As we have seen, the chantwell, as the person responsible for the composition of the lyrics of the kalinda bands, and as the one who harangued the stickfighters into action, was a powerful and authoritative figure. This power was related, in part, to the fact that in the ethos of a post-emancipation society, the newly emancipated members of the lower class, were still struggling with problems of identity and status. Rohlehr declares that "in that melee, the man who was recognized as a possessor of the word, and as a spokesman for the group, occupied a position of supreme importance. Such a person would have been the chantwell of the calinda (sic) bands" (1990:52). Indeed, records of the period indicate that the chantwell possessed an excellent command of rhetoric and fulfilled the role of secular high-priest, poet, prophet and singer, with a status in his group probably second to none. In addition, magic and the supernatural played an important part in the psyche surrounding the chantwell.

Although the modern calypsonian still wears the mantle of his illustrious predecessors, there are subtle changes in the ways in which he creates his role or how the role is, in some cases, prescribed. He has moved away from his mythical world of magic and incantations although the rhetoric is still present and power still resides in his language. Most calypsonians use soubriquets by which they are known throughout the entertainment world, many of which are names of historical figures, including famous warriors.

Some persons have been moved to draw a line of demarcation between a calypsonian and a calypso singer in which the difference, they claim, is one of authenticity. How is this defined? Some argue that the mere singer of words which one has not composed does not justify the lofty title of calypsonian who must at all times be 100 per cent original. Thus, purists complain about the fact that the calypsonian today has no interest in creating an effective narrative, that the product is influenced by the demands of the market and that the final product is now never the work of one person.

There are also fears that the success of the genre has contributed to the way in which the calypsonian operates. Lewis (1968) notes poignantly that the sweet smell of success has converted the calypsonian into a performer. He laments the fact that no longer is the calypsonian the wandering troubador, licensed by popular will to comment as he pleases on social life, but rather he has moved away from the originally lyrical satirist openly chastising the economic system, to one who has now himself become a part of that system, thus inevitably faltering in the quest for

successful satire (1968:34).

Justifiable as this charge my appear, it has to be weighed against the changes which have taken place in the society. While it is true that the early calypsonians sang about events that were taking place in the society, it must be realized that much more is taking place today and it is very difficult to find the time to manage them all. The calypsonians' forte has been to lean toward the bizarre in his calypso, but what was so classified two decades ago, may no longer be regarded in this way. In addition, societal attitudes towards the treatment of sex, violence and denigration of women, favourite topics of the calypsonian in earlier epochs, have undergone modification. The result is that although the calypsonian is still enormously bold about what he says, and still attempts to be as free as he can be, and at times manages to extend this freedom into licence, there is now some degree of social control which he is forced to recognize.

Continuous references by many authors to the calypso as male-dominated and the early chantwell as a "man" of supreme oratorical ability, coupled with the fact that, until a few decades ago, very few women were active in the genre, has led many persons to the conclusion that, until their relatively recent appearance, women have had little participation in the calypso as performers. Indeed, Rohlehr makes the point that the calypso has been "a predominantly male mode, whose themes are manhood and the identity of the individual within the group" (1990:53).

But Elder (1993) argues unequivocally that the calypso is originally a woman's song which was not only sung exclusively by the women who were in the retinue of the early bands, but which was also composed solely by them. Elder's commitment to this viewpoint arises not exclusively from his scrutiny of the records but from the oral narrative of someone who had actually witnessed this phenomenon. Elder claims that according the narrator "the women, who were supporters of the men, provided them with ammunition and stones to pelt the police, and when the men were tired after the stick-fighting, the women served them with food and would then they sing the kaiso while the men were eating and resting. Claims of women singing at an early date are made by other writers (Hill 1972; Pearse 1956; Rohlehr 1990; Warner 1982). Pearse notes the reference to Bodicea "a black female chantwell who loved singing, fighting and drinking" (1956:58) while Hill reveals that according to "old veterans of the late nineteenth century carnival...cariso was both a woman' song and a dance" (1972:58). The implications of these admissions are that the chanterelle must have had an oratorical skill equal to her male counterpart, while at the same time matching his forceful personality and wit, yet by the turn of the century there are indications that the women were no longer occupying a pre-eminent place in the world of calypso singing, which was now male-identified and male-dominated.

Several hypotheses have been advanced to account for the disappearance of women from the medium. One is, that consequent upon the banning of the stick fighting which was the main male martial activity and the forum through which aggression was transmitted between groups, the music became the repository of

fierceness and hostility. Where previously, the energies of the male were directed toward a combination of singing and fighting, he now had to compress his violence into song only, and the words of the calypso singer became increasingly fierce. The *Sans Humanite* (without mercy) or oratorical calypsos which developed in this period and whose words are very fierce are testimony to this development. Thus, it is argued that there is some plausibility in the premise that the women now found themselves on the periphery of a situation in which the male ego was now in conflict among other males but in a different sense than hitherto: that there was a greater distinctiveness of role playing between the genders and the macho image of the calypso became pronounced, thus causing women to withdraw.

Appealing as this contention might be, it does not adequately offer an explanation of why these women, who by many accounts were tough, independent and bold, would have allowed the men to appropriate their music, and force them into withdrawing completely from the genre. An alternative hypothesis for the women's disappearance is related to the interplay between class structure, race and colour which was ongoing in the society, and the influence of the rigid code of censorship. The status of the women who were singing was prescribed and thus diminished, by their race and social class. As black women from the lower class, they were unable to participate in any of the activities outside of their social stratum and although their activities in the bands provided an outlet for their creativity, the manner in which this was expressed, drew the disapprobation of the custodians of the society's morals.

The following description published in the Port-of-Spain Gazette of 1884, gives credence to this view:

> ...the obscenities, the bawdy languages and gesture of the women in the street have been pushed to a degree of wantonness which cannot be surpassed, and which must not be tolerated. Obscenities are no longer veiled under the cloak of words of doubtful meaning, but lechery in all its naked brutality is sung, spoken and represented by disgusting gestures in our public streets. The growing generation of young girls will become the curse of the country if these yearly *saturnalia* are allowed to continue. (Quoted in Rohlehr 1990 p.53)

Although some writers suspect that the women never gave up singing completely and were still present as part of the chorus in the tents and in the carnival bands, a new visibility became apparent in the 1930s when two women reentered the calypso world. The 1960s and 1970s saw a larger number of women entering the field, but it was not until the 1980s that the movement became a groundswell and today more women than ever are singing. Of additional interest is the fact that women calypso singers today cut across racial and social boundaries and the genre is no longer the preserve of the black, lower or working class women.

## Ethnic Influences

Over the years calypsonians have been mainly Negro, nevertheless, it has been a forum in which all ethnic groups have participated to a greater or lesser extent, and there is documentation that at the turn of the century there were mulatto chantwells in Trinidad. Today, in Trinidad where the ethnic distribution of the population indicates in a general sense an even number of blacks to East Indians the latter are not very active in calypso singing, although within the last decade a few men have come forward. In Guyana, where the ethnic distribution is similar there are no East

Indian calypsonians, although interestingly enough there is one Amerindian calypsonian. In Barbados, 80 per cent of the population is black, thus it is not surprising to find that almost all calypsonians belong to this ethnic group. These statistics have tended to shift attention from what has been a very interesting aspect in the development of the calypso, that is, the East Indian influence on the art form in Trinidad. Constance (1991) asserts that the calypso has been greatly enhanced by the language, accent, speech patterns and linguistics of the East Indian immigrants and their descendants. She notes that one example in which "by rapidly rattling off a number of Hindi words the singer (who was not East Indian) hoped his audience would join in the fun as he played with the nonsensical" (1991:57).

## Gendered Discourse in Calypso

The many functions of the calypso have been reflected in its dominant themes which reveal messages that are *in tandem* with the mood and occurrences of the society of the day. The period of World War 1, for example, encouraged calypsos that were patriotic in sentiment, while the Great Depression of the 1930s ushered in an era of calypsos depicting a wide and rich range of social experience. However, among its many parts, calypso has always mirrored gender relations in the society. Thus most researchers agree that the image of women which has been one of the central and recurring themes in early calypsos, is reflective of the ways in which the calypsonians who were mostly male, envisaged women with regard to their social and economic, but above all, sexual roles ( Aho 1984; Elder 1968; Henry and Wilson 1975; Mohammed 1991; Rohlehr 1990). Elder's (1968) analytical study on the

treatment of women in calypso from 1900-1960 isolates some of the themes of calypsos in which women were the referent. These include **sexual jealousy** in which the male makes aggressive attacks upon powerful rivals for the love of the female; **female rejection** in which the male despises the once haughty and beautiful female in retribution for her refusal of his overtures; **magic in females** in which the female reverts to sorcery and supernatural acts in order to be married or attract the attention of the unwilling male; **seduction tales** in which the "weak" female is over-powered by the male animal; **conquest tales** involving open male-female contests in which the battling female is finally conquered; **derision** where there is the outright use of degenerative stereotypes to negatively categorize the female figure in her several forms and in which women are declared to be *inter alia*, bad, superstitious, scheming, unfaithful, immoral or hypocritical. However as Aho (1984) notes there is a "madonna-whore" syndrome which dominates the themes of many calypsos, in which women are either put high on a pedestal or dragged through the gutter. Earlier, Henry and Wilson (1975) had argued similarly, that these dualisms were indicative of the way in the which men in the Caribbean society viewed women and assert that "some of the themes which show these dualisms are better described in calypso songs than in the anthropological literature (1975:165). However, as Huggins (1992) notes, the ideal woman in calypso was **Mother** who was usually a woman who single-handedly raised her brood of children and sacrificed much so that they might be in a favourable social and occupational position.

Huggins observes that "the mother figure in calypso is cherished and revered...only on rare occasions did early calypsos shower praise on any other woman and mothers in calypso generally fared much better than wives and girlfriends" (1992:12).

The women who reentered the calypso world in the 1930s could not be characterized as "taking back their songs", since they were few in number and their voices were ones that were merely accommodating to an agenda that bore few exceptions to what was identified as the male discourse. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw a larger number of women singing, and as though gathering strength in numbers, their voices started to display a greater sense of assertiveness and a desire to portray women as liberated and independent. However, it was a liberation that was defined only in sexual terms and there was little discussion of the oppression women faced outside the sexual relationship. By the end of the 1980s, and continuing into the 1990s the women in many cases are writing their own songs, viewing the narrative and their own life from a special perspective. Women are using their songs to escape from the biological focus on them, a characteristic of the early calypsos.

## Changing Images

In the final analysis, images of women in the calypso have undergone a remarkable metamorphosis in the last decade as men and women eschew the traditional negative portrayals of women. This has been attributed in part to women's consciousness of their strength and the influence of the female performer.

Mohammed (1991) also sees it as a direct result of "the growing dependency of men on female initiative in the labour market" and in "making ends meet in a climate of increasing male unemployment and declining economy" (1991:35).

# CHAPTER V11: HEARING THE VOICES

## The Women and Their Stories

> All autobiographic memory is true. It is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose. (Personal Narratives Group 1989:261)

I have let the women speak freely so that the stories they tell, give us an insight into their lives as they reveal the joy and the pain, the apprehensions and the hopes, the frustrations and the rewards which they experienced and are still experiencing as calypso singers. I have presented the words of the women exactly as they said them and the dialogues give special articulation to the feminine side of calypsonians' experiences.

No voice is identical. It is the uniqueness of that voice bearing the thread of similitude that is interwoven into the shared stories, that gives the narrative the distinctive appearance of a tapestry that is of one colour and yet at the same time of many shades. Further, as Bruner (1986) notes, stories provide the tapestries of cultural and familial drama that map the territory of possible roles and possible worlds that the individual may enter. Partly because of the intensity with which each narrator presented her story and partly because of my view that it would enrich the process, I have decided to present each voice in two ways: first, as I introduce each woman and reveal the unique and intensely personal voice wherein she recounts her individual experiences as she started on the voyage, the events which triggered that beginning and the important milestones which she encountered and passed along the way; secondly, the shared voice, which encapsulates the common views.

## The Unique Voice

**Tina**

Tina was the first woman to be interviewed. I had gone to her home to arrange the time and venue for the interview. She was not there but I met her "reputed" husband who explained that she had gone out to purchase food and there was no telling when she would return. He informed me confidently that should I determine a time and place for the meeting she would be there at the appointed time. I established an appointment for the next day and left although not entirely reassured that the meeting would indeed take place.

Tina arrived as planned and turned out to be a pleasant, articulate woman who looked rather younger than her 28 years. She was quite at ease with the interview process and needed little prompting in the narrating of her story. She disclosed that she was born in Georgetown, the capital city of Guyana, and had attended elementary school and secondary school there. She has three children by her "reputed" husband with whom she has been living for nine years. The last child is just 12 months old and she confided that her main worry at the present time was her inability to find suitable accommodation at an affordable price for herself and her family.

She is not working on a regular basis, and since in Guyana calypso singing is seasonal, this causes some financial hardship for herself and family. Her companion is also a calypsonian and is the current president of the Calypsonians' Association in Guyana, but according to Tina he has a "main" profession as a tailor. Her father is

still alive and is living in one of the rural areas.

She started her singing career in the church and then went on to sing pop music but she has always loved calypso:

> To tell you the truth I started singing from church. I started singing gospels and then went on to pop, and growing I liked calypso and I started singing calypsos from school. That was in 1977.

She is the only member of her family to have chosen a musical profession and her family is very proud of her achievement:

> My family felt very happy, I must say, because I am the only member of the family who is an outstanding performer in this country. The only member of my family who really take up singing, sports, any activity.

Although Tina has won several competitions and has reached the semi-final and final stages in the National Calypso competition on many occasions, she is still waiting to win "the big one". This has been a source of great disappointment to her especially this year when she had performed under very difficult circumstances and, if one were to gauge the reaction of the audience at the semi-final competition, "she was considered a favourite to win the judges' nod." The decision of the judges caused quite a stir because many persons felt that she had been unfairly judged and are still demanding that an investigation be held into the judging system that prevailed:

> A lot of people feel I was robbed. I was sick in Bartica but in spite of that I went out there and I did my thing. I performed to the best of my ability, I pleased everybody, but somehow the judges didn't see it fit to take me through to the quarter finals. I must say that I don't know where I fell short that I had to be knocked out in the calypso competition. We have a problem with the judging system in this country. So somebody wrote in the paper saying that the song I sang was something pertaining to Mash and he don't see how I could have got knocked out because if you check on Trinidad most of the people,

most of the songs they sing is about Carnival and I was boasting up Mash:

*Mash is the best of all*
*And not a festival that I can recall*
*Masquerade for so*
*Steelbands on the go*
*That is festivity*
*In this beautiful garden city*

*Dey got Carnival in La Trinite*
*And dey boast that is the greatest festivity*
*But leh dey come down February*
*If dey want to see pageantry*
*Oh Lawd in we Mashramani*

Although the experience of this last competition has been a bitter one for Tina, she recalled that this was not the first occurrence of its kind:

> In 1987 I was a crowd favourite. I went to Berbice in the quarter finals and I sang a calypso called *Rasta Bite* and there again I was knocked out. But I did not give up. I persevered and I came through to the regional competition and I changed the song and I sang *Talking About Education*. And I beat the whole field, so they had was to put me back [sic] in the finals and I sang *Talking About Education* again I brough eighth and it caused a disturbance in the finals because when the results came out and members of the public heard the position, starting from the bottom, the Emcee hadn't a chance to announce the other positions. He had to ask them to be quiet and plead with them, but it didin't stop there because the public got on the airwaves and talked about it.

Reflecting on what she she had learned from these incidents, Tina observed that they had made her stronger in her resolve to continue singing and that she was more than ever determined to "prove her mettle." However, she did admit to some introspective moments when she had considered giving up calypso singing but she envisages a future in which calypso singing will play a big part and expressed her commitment to the genre thus:

> Many times I think of giving up. But I does say, "Man, look, is a game I like. I like singing on the whole but I **like** kaiso. I like it and you don't just give up so easy. I think that one day I am going to make it up there and I am not going to give up.

**Sally**

Sally is 44 years of age and is a tall, somewhat imposing woman who was born in a rural area of Guyana where her parents and some of her siblings still live. She is not married but has a "reputed " husband by whom she has four children ranging in age from 15 years to 6 years. Her husband has a steady job in one of the para-military organizations and she is not employed outside of the home but considers herself a "a good homemaker".

She comes from a musical family and had an uncle who played the guitar and composed tunes which she sang. Her exposure to the world of calypso came when some male calypsonians visited the area where she lived and heard her sing. They encouraged her to start singing calypso and she left her home and came to the city where she teamed up with other singers who were touring the country singing calypsos and other songs. In 1975 she joined the People's Culture Corps which was a cultural group formed at the instigation of the government then in power. As a member of this group, which consisted of musicians, singers and dancers primarily, she travelled as she describes it "the length and breadth of the country" carrying the government's development message to the people. Sally was one of three women in the group of five calypsonians and she remained with the People's Culture Corps for 12 years.

Sally has been singing calypso for 18 years and would not like to change

because she "likes singing calypso". However, she "may go into spirituals" since she was "brought up in a Christian home." She never won any prizes in the early years, which she attributes to the fact that some of the male calypsonians were composing her songs. "I found that during that time I wasn't able to express myself the way I should seeing it wasn't coming from within me." The situation changed in 1982 when she started composing for herself. Sally feels that composing her own songs was the turning point in her life:

> I feel good, seeing that during the past years I was never lucky to win any prizes and since I started writing my own tunes, you know, start to express myself the way I feel I should express myself because I compose my thing and then having the results, I must feel good. And since I started I won prizes three times.

Sally involves her family in her endeavours especially her children and as she observed:

> With me, I know what I want to sing. I make jottings and as I move about the home doing my housework I start to hum a tune and then I start to extract words from what I have written and to get a chorus. And you would find that as soon as I start humming the little ones they would pick it up and before I finish the tune, everybody knows the tune.

She concedes that most of the women she knows do not compose their own calypsos and that what she does is unusual in Guyana:

> This (composing your own calypso) is not really normal, however. Most of the other women calypsonians, persons write for them because I remember writing a tune for two of the women and the last one, though she didn't win a prize, she went right up to the finals. One of our other female calypsonians won a prize with a tune and words composed by me.

Quite recently a man asked Sally to compose a calypso for him, but she has not done so as yet. Sally is grateful for the support of her husband who encourages her a lot (her emphasis). However, at one time when she was not advancing beyond the quarter-finals and semi-finals in the competitions his encouragement wavered somewhat:

> I was feeling very sorry for myself because I knew that I was good and I wasn't getting anywhere and he would say to me "Why you don' rest yusself?" And I would say. "Look, man, you like your army and I like my calypso and he never bother with me again.

Sally thought that formal training in music would go a long way toward improving her performance but as she acknowledged:

> I don't have any formal musical training. I tried many times to learn music but seeing I was performing with the Culture Corps so much of the time, when it was time to go to lessons, I had to perform, so I became frustrated because when I got to classes the others were way ahead.

She is certain that she will continue in calypso singing for a long time although the spectre of discouragement still rears its head from time to time:

> At one time I didn't like how things were going and I said to myself "I am not going to sing this year" and I stayed away from singing for two years and then I went to audition and when I heard certain tunes I said "I could beat he and I could beat he". And I said "I coming out next year and I not turning back." And so the next year I entered the competition again and I told myself "I only see two persons who could beat me, but I will try" And I brought third that year, the next year I brought second.

**Betty**

Betty is the youngest of the narrators from Guyana. At the time of the interview she was 15 years of age and was a student at one of the more prestigious

high schools in Georgetown. Her high school education will not be completed for another two years and she is an above average student who studies hard and whose ambition is to become an engineer or a doctor. Her parents are both alive but her mother has migrated to the United States of America and she and her siblings - one sister and two brothers - live with their father.

Betty who appeared quite serious for her age, hardly smiled during our interview and responded to the request that she narrate her story in a contemplative manner. She admitted that she had never given an interview to anyone before. However, once she started to talk about her involvement in calypso she became quite voluble. Her family is closely associated with the calypso, since her father, uncle, and aunt are all calypsonians. Her uncle's son is also a calypsonian who won the Calypso Monarch competition three times in Guyana but now lives in Canada. Betty started singing calypso at an early age and she described her fascination with the genre thus:

> I was seven years old and my cousin who was about eight years old was also a calypsonian and I fell in love with calypso because it helps you to express what you want to say and the way he (my cousin) did it made me want to do the same thing and so I asked my uncle to write a song for me. And that is how I got into calypso singing.

It was at this point in her life that Betty knew that "she would always want to sing calypso." That same year she entered the Junior Calypso competition and placed second. The next year she placed first and she has been entering competitions on a regular basis since then. She has entered the Junior Calypso competition five times and placed first on two occasions and second on three. In 1990 there wasn't a Junior Calypso competition and Betty thought she was "capable enough to participate in the

Senior Competition" so she entered that and placed fifth. A significant aspect of that competition was the fact she competed against her father who composed the calypso that she sang: "My father made it to the finals but I did not and I was very surprised and he was surprised too." In 1990 she felt confident enough to enter a local competition that was open to all calypsonians:

> I was not afraid to go against the other people because after all we are all in this together and although I was going to compete against older and more seasoned people I felt I could come through.

Betty did not win the competition but she was one of the finalists and she went to Barbados to record one of the calypsos which she had sung. She has won the Calypso Road March Competition twice and is the youngest person in Guyana to have accomplished this. Her classmates are very proud of her although " a lot of them did not know that I was a calypsonian" because "I had kept it a secret." Now, however, Betty notes that "they are always encouraging me, telling me something, cheering me up, encouraging me to enter other competitions." Betty is critical of some of her fellow calypsonians and the songs they sing because she feels that smut in calypso is gaining the upper hand and this is not right.

Although Betty can be considerd a seasoned performer, her contact with other calypsonians is minimal and she is not a member of the Calypsonians' Association. As she put it:

> I don't really have any contact with anyone. There is a calypso committee or something like that and I am not in the committee and when there is a calypso competition, I only learn about it from the radio or the television. I have very little contact with the other calypsonians.

As far as her future in calypso is concerned, Betty thinks that she will want to continue singing calypso for "a long, long, time" and even if her career goals to be a doctor or an engineer are realized, she noted that "even when I am qualified I would still like to sing calypso."

**Faye**

Faye is a self-assured young woman of 34 years. I had experienced much difficulty in making contact with her as it was the Mashramani season and she was appearing in shows all over the country, leading up to the Calypso finals. In the end, she agreed to meet me on a Sunday morning which was the only time she had available. She comes from a family of three girls and three boys and is the eldest girl in the family where everybody sings:

> I have a very large family. I am speaking of my personal family. I have my mother, brothers and sisters. I have two sisters and three brothers and everybody sings. My entire family. My mother she taught from small, like when Christmas time is coming round, we would be singing carols harmonizing, one person would sing the bass, like my brother, then the soprano, I always had the soprano voice and my mother would sing the alto and things like that.

The family was very religious but not "the very strict religious kind of people" so that as children she and her sisters and brothers were permitted to sing any type of songs, including pop songs. Faye was teaching dance to a group of children from the religious organization to which she belonged when she went to enter her group in a dance competition for the Mashramani celebrations and was encouraged to enter the calypso competition by the organizer. That was in 1984 and although hitherto she had only sung soul and gospel music, she accepted the challenge:

> I said I didn't know that I could sing calypso, you know, I never really sang calypso. But I have a creative mind and I always did creation musically, like with songs and so, but I never created a calypso.

Nevertheless, within a month of agreeing to sing she had composed two calypsos for the competition which she entered. On that occasion, she did not get further than the quarter finals but the organizers liked her calypsos so much that they asked her to put in a guest appearance at the semi-finals. The next year she entered again, once more singing her own compositions, and this time she emerged from a field of 46 contestants to snatch the Calypso crown, the only woman in Guyana to have done this so far. She also won the female competition that year. She left Guyana in 1989 to reside in St Maarten, Netherlands Antilles, and while there she entered and won the first female calypso competition which was organized in that country. Faye has entered the Calypso Queen of the World Competitione[12] four times between 1989 and 1992. Like Sally, Faye thought that formal training in music would enhance her performance as a calypsonian and tried to do something about it:

> I started a music course, that was in 1987 or 1988 but then i had to cut off because of pregnancy at the time, so I didn't get to finish the course, but I definitely want to continue music because it is good as a calypsonian to know what you want and how to put it because sometimes you might not know how to explain something properly to the musician and you wouldn't get exactly what you want. But then some musicians try their best to give you what you want and I feel that Guyanese musicians are trying their best to give you a good job. But I still want to be able to do it for myself so I am venturing out to do that probably in another year or so.

This year Faye did something which no other individual in Guyana has done: she established her own calypso tent. She acknowledged that it was a fledgling venture, but she is encouraged by the support that she has received from other calypsonians

and the general public. Referring to the fact that she composes her own calypsos, Faye said:

> Well, it's just inspiration. I write my own calypsos. I always do and people don't like it because when I won in 1985 and 1986 a few of the elderly calypsonians were telling me "Faye, I have a song for you, I have a song for you". I say no "I want to write my own songs, I don't want people to write songs for me." So a lot of people were mad at me for not taking their songs, saying that I like to do my own thing.

In respect of her future in calypso, Faye sees herself continuing in the field for many years to come: "I am 34 years old and I see myself singing until I am 50, at least as a competitor, and then I would just relax and give advice to others. I don't think I would want to compete after then.

**Mary**

Mary is her mid-30s and works full time as a manageress in one of the departments of a well-known store in Barbados. Because of the constraints of her schedule, she agreed to meet me during the hour-long break which she had for lunch and this proved to be a satisfactory arrangement. Mary was born in England of a Jamaican mother and a Barbadian father and came to live in Barbados at an early age. She is married to a professional musician and has two children who are aged nine and ten.

As a young person, she sang in school choirs and church choirs and entered the Teen Talent Competition in Barbados where she placed second. She started singing calypso in 1989 at the instigation of her husband who was at that time producing an album. He told her that he had one track left on the album for a calypso and since there was a calypso available, he wondered whether she would

consider singing it. She had never sung calypso professionally before but she was confident that she could rise to the task:

> I thought I could sing it. I had some background in singing in school choirs, church choirs and so on. And it was a song called ***WHERE THE GOOD MEN GONE*** and so I said "Yes I'll give it a try". So I went to the recording studio and they played it on the airwaves and it was a big hit, and that was how I started.

On the strength of her performance, Mary was invited to sing in a tent that same year. She feels that the calypso she sang had a lot to do with her initial success:

> So I was invited to sing in the tent and from then it took off. Everybody was asking "Who is this liberal woman singing ***WHERE THE GOOD MEN GONE***? The women especially, they were supporting me. The song...at first, it was very controversial with the men. They were a little bit offended, you know, the lyrics, it was perhaps a little bit too close to the truth I think, and it hit some nerves. You know they gave my husband a hard time. They said "How could you let your wife get up there and sing this type of thing"?:
>
> *Men single or married, they are all the same*
> *Seems it boast dem ego when dey cause me misery and pain*
> *When they are cheating and de wife object*
> *Like the shameless brute*
> *Dey want to break the poor woman neck*
> *They are countless battered battered women*
> *A few we hear about*
> *Some does use false teet' 'cause*
> *The real ones the man lic' out*
>
> *The lot of makeup dey wear*
> *De rouge and blush they use*
> *Are to hide the blows and scars*
> *Of constant abuse*
>
> *I ask whe' de good men gone*
> *Looks like dem gone away*
> *Where have de good men gone*
> *Like none ain't 'bout here*

*Tell me where the good men gone*
*Have they gone into hiding*
*Where have the good men gone*
*De women asking*

Although a virtual newcomer to calypso, Mary exceeded her own expectations and those of her supporters:

> I debuted then, went straight to the semi-finals, went to the finals, this is with all the big guns in calypso, all the men, all the veterans, and everything, and I placed fourth. That was a big encouragement and believe me, I have had support right through.

Mary thinks that female calypsonians have a special role to play and she tries to ensure that her calypsos carry a message. In addition, she is conscious of the fact that people in the society pay keen attention to what she does. Although she tries not be critical of the other female performers, she does note that she escapes criticism because she is more conservative in her stage costumes than some of the other female singers. However, last year she tried to project a new image in terms of the way she dressed for stage performances and the results were not what she expected:

> I am the more conservative type so they [the audience] look at me as being something else. I can say this because I am speaking from experience because last year 1992 I tried to step out of that mould that they have me in because I wanted to be a little more bold. I did this in my dress and it wasn't accepted, they did not accept this, they want me to present myself in a different light than Barbara.

It was her manager who reported the public reaction to her new look:

> He came to me and said he was getting feedback that people did not like the new way I was dressing and he said it was my fault basically, because when I debuted in 1989 I came out in a conservative, sophisticated mood, sort of thing, so now for me to break out of that it would have to be a gradual thing. I don't know, I don't want to look smutty or anything but it's just like they've categorized me. So now,it's pretty hard getting out of it, you know.

Mary does not compose her own calypsos but she does not think that this is a problem, and if a writer should present her with a calypso that is against her principles, she would definitely reject it:

> People tend to think if you don't write your own lyrics you are not really a good calypsonian, but for me I take care in what I sing. If I don't believe in what I am singing I can't sing it with conviction.

Calypso will definitely play a big part in Mary's future although she recognizes the problems and frustrations which are involved, especially when the rewards seem elusive:

> You have to learn to play the game and I do that very well. People have been asking me from last year to now. "You going again this year Mary"? And I say, "Of course, once the Good Lord gives me the strength and the health, I'll be out there again. You know, I don't let the little disappointments stop me.

**Cassandra**

Cassandra is a soft-spoken woman aged 23 who is a senior officer at one of the major banks in Barbados. She attended one of the island's renowned high schools and also completed a couple of years in the Faculty of Arts at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus. Cassandra comes from a family that is musically inclined. Her mother sings, her cousins sing secular and gospel music and she has "family all over singing." She started singing about the age of four in Sunday school. In elementary school, she was in the school choir, but in high school she decided to forego singing in favour of her academic pursuits. At University she joined the choir and performed at various venues in Barbados. In 1989, encouraged by her friends in the choir, she entered a campus-sponsored calypso competition and found

herself the only female in a field of six competitors:

> It was an experience for me because it was so different. There were very few women singing calypso on campus before this. I placed third in the competition and the same year I decided to go from Carnival on campus to the bigger arena, that is, the calypso tent.

Cassandra does not hesitate to point out that for her this was a fulfilment of a dream, and in particular because of what she feels calypso can and should do:

> I have liked calypso from the time I was small. I find it is a very good for communication. It helps to get your messages across and if you listen to them, they are not all meant for partying, for bands, they have quite a bit of messages behind them. So from there I just kept going.

She considered doing "back-up" singing but was persuaded by the manager of the tent that she shouldn't be singing "behind there" but should "come up front". She complied and was the only one from the tent to go on to the semi-finals. In 1990 the season was not very "fruitful" for her and in 1991 she missed the competition because she was in hospital to have her son, but at the end of that year there was a calypso competition for women only - the first ever local competition for women in the island. She entered and brought second. This bolstered her confidence for as she explains, "I think that helped me to realize that I was not so bad after all."

Cassandra does not write her own calypsos and since she started until this year she has stuck with the same composer - a man, but this year because he has been busy she has gor herself a new composer. Like many of the other women Cassandra has definite ideas about the messages calypso should spread, but she will not allow herself to be limited in her repertoire:

> When I first started to sing, I did mostly social commentary. Last year is the first year that I ever did anything tending toward party, but the song still carried a message, with a commentary on the economy, telling us that you can't allow yourself to get too bogged down, you just have to enjoy yourselves, take off some of the tension. So I used that song to carry that message to Barbadians. This year I am going toward party again but I will still include some social commentary, because I think it is all meshed in, the speed and the message can go together you don't have to be totally slow and boring.

However, although calypso is her first preference, if the occasion warrants she will sing anything. "I can sing anything. I can sing ballads. I know a lot of people complain that the dub music is taking over but I am not against dub, it's just that I prefer calypso." Speaking about her future in calypso Cassandra is of the view that she can go far in the medium, but at the same time she is aware that experience and public exposure are important:

> Some people think that I can make it to the top. But right now I need to find a footing, a firm footing in the art form first, because being with a Junior Tent it's difficult to get recognition. My tent was one of the last tents to be formed and competing against the more seasoned performers, in the more established tents it is very, very difficult to step in to that field because those are the ones that get the bigger audiences and they are the ones who benefit both financially and with the public support.

Cassandra has a manager who handles all her business arrangements and she would love to perform overseas but because of her job this is difficult. She can only accept bookings on long weekends or else she has to schedule her vacation to coincide with the performance dates and so far this has not been possible, since very often there is little advance notice of performance requests. One of her dreams is to have an all-female tent, but she acknowledges the difficulties which this presents. "We are few and most of us have children and most of us have our other professions so it is

difficult to get together in one common place at a time which is convenient to everybody so I think that is the biggest problem." Nevertheless, it is a dream which she will not give up because she thinks it is important not only for herself, but for all the other women in the genre.

**Barbara**

Barbara is 29 years old and she is a singer with a band in Barbados four nights a week. However, since this is a "night-time" occupation, and she has financial commitments, she also works during the day as a reservation clerk at one of the island's resort hotels. As she noted:

> Calypso singing is part time because it only comes around once a year to my regret, but I sing at night still with a band. So I work like four nights a week, that's my regular occupation, life, but since it is not so lucrative on the island, you have to have a supporting job, so then I do work in the daytime six days a week.

Her husband is a professional musician and she has a daughter who is just under two years of age. She started singing from the age of four year, at parties, in the classroom, wherever the occasion warranted. After singing at her school graduation, she was invited to enter the island-wide Teen Talent Competition in 1981 and was the first female to win the competition. Right after that she got involved in singing with bands, mainly on the hotel circuit. She got involved in calypso in 1988:

> I never thought about it before that although I might have done one or two calypso from the repertoire of Trinidadian women calypsonians. So I was asked then and I said "Sure, I'll give it a try and see what I come up with and that's how I am here today.

Barbara feels that people react to her differently since she started to sing calypso: "My name is now more of a household name, people kind of like look out for you

so to speak more now than as opposed to before." In her first year as a professional calypsonian, she went as far as the semi-finals but her tent withdrew from the competition at that stage. The next year she went as far as the finals and was second to one of the more seasoned and well-known male calypsonians. Since then she has continued singing and even appeared on stage when she was pregnant with her son who is now 17 months old.

On the subject of composing calypsos, Barbara regrets that she she still has to turn to others for assistance in this area but as she opined:

> Unfortunately for me I have not yet shown for myself the talent to write, sometimes I think about it as to whether I would be able to but I can think of one or two ideas and I think until I come to the point where it would be an idea that would be adhered to or listened to, well then I don't think I would be able to write.

Nevertheless, Barbara is resolute about the type of calypos that she sings, especially if they depict women in a bad light. "I would refuse to sing it yes, if someone brought an idea that is derogatory to women I would refuse it." As for her future in calypso Barbara said:

> Singing is my life period and I want to do calypso as long as I can do it. Wherever it takes me I want to go, that is it in a nutshell. I just want to be the best that I can be.

**Myrna**

Myrna is a 31 year old woman who agreed to meet me for our interview at a location in downtown Barbados. Because I knew that it was a particularly busy place and I was likely to have some problem in identifying her, I asked her to

describe herself which she did confident in the knowledge that I would have no difficulty in recognizing her.

Myrna describes herself as a "performer" which according to her, means that she sings full-time with a musical group in Barbados. She has been with this group for six years, the same length of time that she has been singing calypso professionally:

> I started singing calypso professionally about six years ago, but before that I used to do backup vocals with one of the tents for about three years and I actually got into calypso by accident.

According to Myrna that "accident" occurred when in 1986, the manager of one the tents wrote a calypso for a male calypsonians who decided that he did not like the song and was not going to sing it. She was asked to sing the song instead and it was an immediate hit with the audience. Decsribing her reaction to this, Myrna says, "that was how I started and the feeling was so good that I had to continue."

In 1986 she was the first woman to make it to the calypso finals in Barbados but she did not win the title, a fact which she attributes to audience reaction to the calypso that she sang in the competition. She hints that the puritanical nature of some members of the Barbadian society caused them to react to the double entendre which is contained in the calypso and she finds it difficult to understand. As she had explained earlier, when the song was written originally, it was intended for a male singer but that he refused to sing it. In order for me to get the point she is making, she sang the first stanza of the calypso for me:

*Well to tell the truth come to picking fruits*
*I'm not hard to understand*
*Banana is me scene*

*Ripe, yellow or green*
*I love a Banana Man*
*But don't think I gon take the gift*
*Of the first banana that pick*
*From experience I gon choose*
*The Banana that I going to use*

When asked about the *double entendre* that is evident in the song, she shrugged philosophically and admitted:

> The song is sort of suggestive. But I think it is how you look at it and I find that most Bajan audiences did not appreciate the song and when I go overseas I usually do that song and it is go great to the audience and that gives me a good feeling.

Myrna has experienced "tremendous support" from her family, especially her son who is nine years old:

> He is my biggest critic and when I am preparing my songs, he would say "Mom. .y, I don't like this" or "Mommy I don't like that" and he is just nine years old and I listen to him a lot, because you can learn from them. But he is my greatest critic and I take him with me when I go to sing in the tents and he would listen to what the audience says.

When it comes to composing her own calypsos, Myrna is like many of the other women and leaves the writing to someone else but although she is not a composer, she has very definite ideas concerning what she likes to sing and why. She says, "I like social commentary and I choose the things that are going on in the society. I like to educate the people about what is going on, not only through the lyrics, but also through the music, I like to get them involved."

Myrna loves the thrill and excitement which calypso singing entails, and if she had to live her life over she would choose the same route, but there would be some differences. As she explained: "I would choose to be a calypsonian but I would also

choose to be a nurse, because as I said before, calypso is only a one- season thing while a nurse is you know...But if it was like Trinidad I would be nothing else but a calypsonian." She is also aware that acceptance of calypso singing as a profession for women is still not there so that if she had a daughter who wanted to follow in her footsteps, "I would say Sweetheart, I have nothing against it, but if you want to sing calypso, make sure you have another job, not in this society." With regards to her future in calypso, Myrna said:

> As long as I have the strength and the material I am going to go for it. I am going to go for it as long as I am able. That is me, that is from the heart.

**Rhonda**

Rhonda posed something of a problem in several ways. First of all, I knew that she was born in Guyana, but is now a citizen of Barbados, having married a Barbadian. Further, she currently resides in New York but travels frequently between the United States of America and Barbados and during the period I was in Barbados she was in New York.

This was the only interview which was conducted by telephone and before I started I was not sure whether I should categorize Rhonda as a Barbadian or as a Guyanese. Rhonda solved this dilemma immediately my declaring that "right now I don't even have a Guyana passport. I have a Bajan passport. I am a citizen of Barbados because my husband is Bajan."

Her voice was strong and confident over the telephone and she informed me right at the beginning that she did not mind giving me her age because as far was as

she was concerned "she looks good for her age". She is in fact 45 years old and has four children, the eldest of whom is 28 years old and the youngest 11 years. She started her career as a singer with a band in her native Guyana when she was 17 years of age. Rhonda noted that in her family "entertainment comes natural" and there are other members of her family in the entertainment field, including a brother who owns bands in Barbados, a sister who sings background vocals in the tents and two nephews who are singers.

Rhonda went to Barbados in 1976 to record a calypso, met her husband who was the leader of the band which accompanied her, married him within a few months and has been living away from her native land ever since. Rhonda has gone on several tours singing calypso and has done shows in Colombia, St Maarten, Boston and New York. However, her greatest glory came when in 1988 she made history in Barbados by becoming the first woman and the only one so far, to win the title of Calypso Monarch. Nevertheless, this victory created much controversy as articles in the media and elsewhere argued that since she was not born in Barbados she should not have won the crown. Rhonda noted that the furore continued for months and caused her much pain, but that it arose because:

> The guy who wrote the song for me, I beat him. That year seven calypsonians and the reigning King were competing for the crown. I was the only woman among the men.

Describing her feelings at that time Rhonda said:

> Through all the controversy it was so big this thing went on for months and months. People were saying that I wasn't supposed to win the crown because I wasn't Bajan. It was hell but there were some people

> who were supporting me, there were a few people who spoke about it on the radio and wrote in the newspapers saying it was wrong.

In spite of the debacle, Rhonda entered the competition the next year and as she had feared, the result was "a nightmare", for she finished at the bottom of the ladder. In Rhonda's view this could only have been because people were still upset over her win the previous year and although she tries hard not to be bitter about it, the hurt is still there:

> It was a spiteful thing because there was no way that I could have brought last, because they even brought this guy from Trinidad. He is a critic of calypso and when he give the decision I was supposed to bring third, but they had it planned before the competition because they felt I shouldn't have won the year before, so the next year they bring me last.

Rhonda is especially piqued by the lack of support she received from the women's groups in Barbados. She put it thus:

> Now they had this organization for women. I made history in Barbados by being the first woman to win the Calypso Monarch competition and they didn't even come out and support me and they had this meeting and they invited me and I lambasted them because I tell them none of them ever support me when I won or even when they brought me last.

She sang in 1989 but did not enter the competition and again in 1991 when she got as far as the semi-finals. Finally at the end of 1991 she decided to leave Barbados and return to the United States where she had lived before.

**Juanita**

Juanita is 30 years old and the mother of a young son. She commenced her singing career when she just three years old, performing at church in her native Trinidad. At that time she sang mainly hymns and patriotic songs. Referring to her

entree into the world of calypso Juanita points to the influence of her father and the role her mother played:

> I can't speak about the other female calypsonians family wise, but I can tell you what springboard I used and how I got in. My father took us wherever he went to perform in Trinidad. So that if he had to go to a tea party he would take us. All the competitions, all the private affairs, he would take us. My mother provided theclothes, she was the seamstress. It was a family thing.

As Juanita grew and continued singing, mostly with her father, her efforts attracted the attention of one of the leading male calypsonians and the leader of a tent and she was invited to sing professionally in the tent, where there were other calypsonians of "name and worth." The year was 1979 and Juanita considers it as her "boom year in calypso" because it marked the launching of her career as a solo calypsonian when she was "thrown into the arena" with grown-ups. It was also the year she made it to the semi-finals.

While still at high school, Juanita, along with her sister, was offered the opportunity to travel abroad with a calypso groups led by a famous male calypsonian. A choice had to be made between staying at school and completing her examinations and joining the group. While her sister opted for the former course, Juanita took the latter and the tour which was originally scheduled to last one week was extended to six months so that by the time she returned to school she was well behind in her work. Speaking of this experience Juanita said:

> The teachers would complain saying "All you doing is singing calypso and you not studying for exams", but I must say here that I have not regretted going into calypso. It has opened many doors for me. You don't have to have a degree to get what you want in society. The point is, you must know what you want.

However, she acknowledges that because she was her father's daughter the road for her was rendered less difficult. At the same time, she acknowledges that this association has its negative side:

> It's like where people run you down at Carnival time to say "I know you as the daughter of...but what is your real name?" I get upset when people ask me what is my real name. I prefer to be asked what is my Christian name.

On the issue of what being a calypsonian means to her Juanita asserted:

> It has been nice being a female calypsonian. I wouldn't have changed my life, but nobody forced me to sing calypso, nobody said I had to sing because of my family. Everything that I own is as a result of calypso money.

Juanita also considers herself lucky because she does not have to "go and look for calypsos". This means that she and her family are very involved in the composition of her calypsos, but as she explained: "In our family, we have not ruled out singing other people's compositions." Her mother, apart from being the main composer in the family, is also responsible for designing and making the costumes that she wears for performances, while she and her sister provide the melodies and her brother does the graphics for the album which they produce. She describes the whole undertaking as "a family concern because we are all into the arts."

Juanita has made it to the semi-finals on several other occasions but has never gone to the finals, but she knows that "once I make it to the finals I should be able to use some of those past experiences." So confident is she of achieving this goal that she declares firmly her intention to stay in the genre. As she revealed:

> The only thing I would pray about is that I don't get blind and that I don't get laryngitis or something that would prevent me from singing. I guess that is the reason my sister composed for me a calypso called I ***WOULD NEVER STOP SINGING CALYPSO***. And it is intended to say why it opened so many doors for me.

*Calypso history should be taught in the school curriculum*
*It should also form the basis of parent/child relations*
*Every child thru' Trinbago whenever them tourist ask for calypso*
*You must be proud to show you know*
*Your cultural heroes*

*Is thru' kaiso I know 'bout extempo*
*Kaiso Queen, Young King and Dimanche Gras Show*
*Is thru' kaiso I tour America*
*Grew up in the Caribbean pardner*
*Kaisonians I want you to know*
*Anywhere I go*
*I will keep on singing calypso*

**Melissa**

I had agreed to interview Melissa at the club where she was performing. She is a member of a group of four women singing calypso as a team and like the other members of the group, found it convenient to be interviewed when they were all together. This meant that I had to go to the club where they were scheduled to perform.

Melissa is 44 years old, comes from a large family and is the last child in a family of thirteen. She herself is a single parent with three children and is also a grandmother. Melissa was not always a calypso singer. She said:

> I started out as a pop singer and a singer of rhythm and blues and I sang with two bands. I used to sing calypso in the Best Village Competition and I was three times monarch in that competition. But in 1980 I was asked to come and sing in a tent and that is how I enter the big time.

However, Melissa conceded that she had a previous opportunity to enter what she calls the "big time", but her lack of confidence prevented her from doing so. She noted:

> The first year that I came out in calypso right now I am still mad with myself because the year before that I was approached to come in the tent. I tell them "Me, I ain't no calypsonian, how you could ask me about calypso? I am a singer now you coming ask me to sing calypso? And I didn't come at all. So now I regret that year but again I making up for it, I making up for that first year that I didn't come out.

Melissa indicated that she was not in a position to do much talking because she was suffering from laryngitis. However, in response to my query, she revealed that this would not hinder or detract from her performance on stage because, "when I go out there I forget everything and all I concentrate on is the people out there. I am a different person on stage."

Nevertheless, Melissa expressed some strong views on calypso and calypsonians, especially the place of women in the genre:

> The men are always out front. The women always have a hard fight. It has always been harder for us. I think it's because they are afraid of us. But the four of us women have managed to overcome some of the difficulties.

Melissa has been singing calypso for a total of 15 years, and although she has sung her way into the finals of the Calypso Monarch competition on at least three occasions, she has never won the coveted crown. The conviction that she will do so one day helps to foster her determination to continue in the genre.

**Connie**

Connie has retired from the active world of calypso singing, but she is still "involved in the business". Outlining the nature of this involvement, Connie explained that she is in charge of the food concession at one of the calypso tents and thus is still "involved." Connie was suffering from a bout of influenza when I contacted her but agreed to be interviewed by me if I would come to her home. After giving me directions, she noted that I only had to inquire of anyone in the vicinity where *Calypsonian Connie* lived and I would have no problem.

Connie related that in order to realize her goal of becoming a calypso singer, she started off as an usher:

> I started off as an usher and I worked at that for two years and the third year I went into the chorus group. My goal for going in to usher and the chorus group was really to sing calypso and that was a way of winding myself up to be on the calypso stage. I get into the chorus to be out front in time to come.

She would have loved to continue singing calypso but she has had to retire because of ill health and on the advice of her doctor:

> Now I never liked to do slow songs. I always like something uptempo and this prancing on the stage used to affect me badly. Sometimes I'm up there and everybody talking and enjoying themselves, but I'm feeling it. As though I am going to drop down sometime, you know, and my doctor he sit down and had a nice chat with me and I see where it is and I leave it.

Connie conceded that the world of calypso singing is not easy and she has had to make many sacrifices, yet calypso singing has done much for her financially:

> Well, calypso singing has done a lot for me, which I think I coulda get a lot more out of it, but I never had the opportunity to get more out of it, but it has done a lot for me by making my children survive.

She recognized some of the difficulties that "career" might have caused had she lived in another society:

> As a matter of fact if I was living in New York, I might be in prison for leaving me kids alone in the house at a tender age and going to look for money to give them and I been doing that for years. Sometimes I leave and I just ask the neighbour to please throw an eye on them for me and I fly out and go because sitting down and watching them, that isn't love. So I was the sole provider and my family was helped by my calypso singing.

Connie has few regrets about her choice of profession noting that: "It is better to look at it now and know that it was good while it lasted. I used to enjoy it very much".

**Tania**

Tania is another member of the group of four women singing calypso in Trinidad. I interviewed Tania at the same time and venue that I had interviewed Melissa because again it was the only opportunity to do so. Tania who is 33 years old is a wife and mother of three sons.

Tania admitted that although she always liked some of the female calypsonians, her entry into calypso was more or less inspired by a man:

> The person who really brought me into calypso was a man who is my composer now. He was the one who heard me singing with a band and he said "You could sing calypso?" and I said "Me?" and he said "Yes".

Prior to that she was a "regular spectator" at shows where other calypsonians were performing and all the time she was "observing" and "learning." Her debut as calypso singer in 1987 enabled her to be a part of this world that she confesses she finds "very exciting."

Her goal is to be "known on the international scene" and it is one that she feels confident of achieving.

Tania was of the view that calypsos should carry a message and being a mother of three teenage boys she ensures that many of her calypsos are "oriented around the family." Tania also believes that one of the most important things for a female calypsonian is to have faith in herself and to repsect herself:

> So the first thing you have to do is to believe in yourself. If you do that, it will happen, not all at once, but then the world wasn't built in a day. And as long as you come into it truthfully and always be a woman who respects herself, it is going to happen.

Tania also sounded a warning to those women who are only interested in the financial rewards which calypso can bring:

> My advice to women who want to sing calypso is this. You have to love calypso, love the art. If you come into it to make money, it is definitely not going to work.

Tania asserted that female calypsonians who are singing today owe a great deal to the pioneers in the field, because: "Those women paved the way and paid dues for the younger female calypsonians, because some of the things that they went through, the women today are not going to experience those things."

This question of a debt owed, placed Tania at the stormy centre of a controversy this year, when in her opinion, one of the other female calypsonians sang a calypso in which she depicted herself as the person who had brought female calypso singing to the "heights" which it has currently attained. Tania was obviously incensed at what she saw as effrontery to the "black women trail-blazers of calypso" by a woman whose claim to African heritage was "dubious." Tania responded with a

calypso that attacked the other woman's credentials: as a singer, as a person and as and a Caribbean woman. Tania confessed that the resulting publicity in the media and the opinion of some members of the public that the "women were at each other's throats" was unfortunate, but she felt very strongly on the issue, arguing that: "One should never forget who had to bear the brunt of the early problems and it is not fair that people should try to come in now mainly because of the money."

**Desiree**

Desiree is another member of the "group of four" and this is her 19th year singing calypso. She was born in Tobago and was initiated into calypso while still at high school. She was the first female to enter the competition for high school students and she placed first. After that there was no turning back because she the entered and won the title of Tobago Monarch. She stressed,:"I say Monarch because it was a competition which men and women entered."

Like many of her counterparts in the calypso world Desiree credits her family with much of her success. "My family has been a source of inspiration since very many o f them are in the arts too and I cannot express how much support they have given me." Desiree writes a lot of her own material and she writes for others as well. Her calypsos are "inspirational messages" and she is very proud of the fact that the calypso which gave the "group' the prominence it now enjoys, was written by her:

> I wrote it and it is called ***AMBATAILA WOMAN*** and Bataila is the French Creole for battle. This song goes back in history and places the Caribbean woman in a position of dominance. She has always been there where her man is. He was fighting stick fights and she was there. He was working, she was singing on the plantation, and I am here to represent that same woman who started for me so long ago.

*Who am I you ask who am I (who am I)*
*Who am I you ask who am I (well I'm gonna tell you now)*
*With a sneer on your face*
*Out to herald disgrace*
*What can you do*
*Sister who are you*
*I am who chant loud on your plantation*
*Melodies for my Bataila man*
*What's my name, claim to fame*
*Listen let me explain*
*I'm Bataila woman*
*I form your battle ring*
*When you fight I sing*
*Ambataila woman*
*Standing up with me man*
*AMBATAILA WOMAN*

Desiree had no hesitation in saying that her calypso singing days are far from over but yet as she admitted, there are moments of doubt:

> The amazing thing about one year is that you does wonder, like a successful year like this year, you say "I wonder what next year would be like and that takes you from year to year. I would be 37 years this year and I feel that I could go on for another 37 or more.

She confessed that the lifestyle of the calypso singer can be hazardous to family life and that her marital relationship suffered because of it for although her husband knew that she was an entertainer when they got married, very soon her profession became a problem:

> I was married. I divorced my husband so that now when I go home, my own key turn my door and I jump on my bed. But it wasn't easy. When I was married, it was a problem, a real problem.

Pursuing the question of male-female relationship, Desiree emphasized that she would brook no interference from a man with what she sees as a God-given talent to sing. She said:

> I live with my mother and she helps me a lot and she knows what it is all about. But I don't think it have no man...the man...I will talk flat, eh...the man to come between me and this calypso thing ain't born yet. He mother dead, he father dead, so he ain't able to be born again at all. He not coming to be between me and this at all. I see this as a talent that God has given me and I think that nobody but God should take this away from me.

**Dawn**

Dawn was the last of the "group" to be interviewed. The venue was the same: the club. Dawn is a statuesque woman of 36 years who exudes an air of authority and supreme self-confidence. Although the members of the group are on equal footing with each other, Dawn seems to be the acknowledged leader. Born on the island of Tobago, Dawn was exposed to calypso at a tender age because her mother was always singing calypso around the house:

> Well I could say that I was always exposed to the art. Even way back in school, taking part in choirs and so on. I sang in church choirs and I was always exposed to music as a whole. I was a part of the Prime Minister's Best Village programme that we had running in T'dad. I was a part of that group, mainly in drama and music and while performing in that Best Village competition, I was approached by a fellow calypsonian, to enter the calypso arena, to which I never saw myself as a calypsonian, I was more into folk and gospel. And I would have really liked to excel as a folk singer because that was what I liked. I admired Miriam Makeba a lot that was the type of music that I was interested in. And from there I went on the auditions. I said "What the heck, why not try?' and then I was successful in being selected to sing at one of the tents and from there I never looked back.

From that start Dawn has gone on to win several calypso titles and these include Calypso Queen of Trinidad and Tobago, Calypso Queen of the World and is the first calypsonian to be crowned Carifesta Calypso Monarch.[13] Dawn described her calypso style:

> I am a person who like to go out there and deliver and as I always say, if I am singing Mary Had A Little Lamb and you in the audience you must be convinced is a lamb that Mary had. And when I come off not thinking is a car.

The support which Dawn has received from her family is greatly appreciated by her as she noted: "I have support from my family right through. I can't complain about that." Like Tania before her, Dawn has little time and patience for those people who try to "sneak into calypso through the back door " and who do not pay enough respect to the women who "went through the hardships to get us where we are."

Further, Dawn felt that calypsonians, especially females, have an important role to play in society and that they should behave in a manner which would ensure that they are given the respect they deserve. She is of the view that her group is an integral part of this process of making people notice women calypsonians, and that the performances of the group have gone a long way towards instilling respect for women. She also feels that they act as role models for the youth:

> I know that we all project that image. Even today, I had an experience. I was in town and another thing I see we go through with children, sometimes we passing down the street and the children would call out and say "Hey look Dawn, look Dawn". Today I went in a store to get something and three schoolgirls were passing on the sidewalk and one of them looked in the store and she saw me and they had already passed the store and they came back and pointed me out.

Observing the effect which this type of recognition has one her, Dawn said:

> At that time you might be in your worst mood, but you can't show them it, you have to smile with them, make sure that they don't see you in a false light. After they pass, you gon' back to your old self. You can deal with yourself after that. But at that time you have to show them a good face because they looking at you, you see.

**Renata**

Renata was a difficult woman with whom to make contact. I had been given a telephone number but on each occasion that I called, it was answered by a man who finally explained that he was her husband. On the third occasion as I outlined the nature of my inquiry, he told me what time would be convenient for me to interview Renata, taking into consideration the fact that she was performing at calypso shows almost every night and did not get home until the early hours of the morning.

Before meeting her for the interview, I had seen Renata on stage at one of the tents. She was the only East Indian performer on the progam and came across as a dynamic, vivacious person who moved across the stage with fluidity and grace. Her interaction with the audience bespoke an artiste who was comfortable with the adulation which she was receiving. The person who faced me that morning was a demure, petite woman who seemed ill at ease at the thought of giving an interview. Her first words to me confirmed the feeling that I had: "I can't talk, but I can sing, so you will have to excuse me."

Renata is 29 years of age and in addition to being a calypso singer, she is an accomplished dancer in the Indian tradition and commenced her musical career singing classical Indian songs. She also participated in Indian cultural pageants singing songs of the chutney type. However, because she was intrigued by calypso she moved into the genre in 1987 and had her first major hit the next year. Renata explained that she was very excited by this especially when she realized that her "star

status" was not limited to her native land: "Even I sang in Toronto at the Stadium and I was eight months pregnant with my daughter and the people were very happy with me."

However, as the first East Indian woman to figure prominently in calypso singing, she has been the subject of harsh criticism from some members of the orthodox Hindu community in Trinidad who have spared no effort in attacking the motives and even sanity of Renata who, in their view, is "a thorn among Indian women" and whose decision to "throw up her high upbringing and culture to mix with vulgar music, sex and alcohol in Carnival tents" reveals that "something is wrong with her psyche."[14]

Renata stoutly defended her position, calling the criticism "unjust and unfair" and refuses to succumb to what she sees as the narrow-mindedness of her critics. She related:

> Is mostly from the Indian community. I don't know why they have criticized. They have their reasons. I don't know why they don't want me to sing calypso, maybe because I am the first Indian woman to sing and [they feel] that Indian people, especially a woman shouldn't come out in the open and sing calypso. You know what they say? They say that for an Indian girl to throw up her culture is a bad thing. Well, I look at it like this. I am a Trinidadian and if I like calypso so much, why can't I sing it? Especially since I am very good at it.

One of Renata's calypso's highlights the issue:

> *They give me blows last year Oh Lord*
> *For doing soca*
> *But it shows how much they know about the culture*
> *For the music of the steeldrum from Laventille*
> *Cannot help but mix with the rhythm from Caroni*
> *For it's the symbol of how much we come of age*
> *It's a brand new age*

In addition, she is strengthened in her resolve by the attitude of her family who support her fully, although she admitted that there are times when it is difficult to balance her role as wife, calypsonian and mother. Her husband who is a teacher but also acts as her manager has been instrumental in charting her career path and the major decisions are made by him:

> My husband goes wherever I go. Sometimes I accept jobs when he is on holiday so that he can go with me. Now that it is the [Carnival] season I am singing in the tents and he takes me every evening and he brings me home, Sometimes we don't come until three o'clock in the morning because we live very far.

Renata observed that she also felt a sense of gratification from the response of her audiences and that this bolsters her self-confidence:

> Well, I guess right through the people love me, because it does have a mixed audience and when I do my shows the response is very good and there is a lot of mixed audience and I guess I enjoy that very much.

Speaking of the difference this has made she said:

> I am more confident with myself now. I know how to move on a stage now and I tell you I don't move with flats. When I say flats, flat shoes. People wonder how I does move with heels on. I could jump off the stage and jump back on.

Renata does not compose her calypsos, rather this is done for her by other calypsonians but she has no complaints about this arrangement although this means that she does not have the first say in the choice of topics. At the same time, this has caused a widening of the rift between herself and some members of the Indian community because some of the calypsos that she sings can be regarded as being disrespectful of "Indian culture."

Reflecting on the controversy which surrounded her this year because of a similar problem, Renata conceded that she was reluctant to sing the calypso at first:

> You know I get a lot of criticism and people were calling me names and all that so I didn't want to do the song. Actually my husband and I we both sat down and listen to it, we didn't hear anything wrong with it. It carrying a message and I said I would do the song.

Renata has a burning desire to win the coveted calypso crown and feels that will be the pinnacle of her career:

> I will be here for the longest while, but what I want to do is I want to get in the **BIG YARD** first. The Big Yard is the savannah, you know, and that is my biggest aim right now.

**Laura**

Laura was the youngest of the female calypsonians to be interviewed. Even at the tender age of ten, Laura is no newcomer to the calypso scene, for she has been singing since she was four years old. Laura is in elementary school and the interview was at her school, where, if one were to judge from the reaction of the principal and the teachers, she was regarded as a special person. Laura is the Junior Calypso Monarch of Trinidad and Tobago, a title that she won just a few days prior to our interview, having emerged victorious from a field of over 15 contestants of both sexes. I had seen her appear as a guest artiste at the Senior Calypso Monarch competition and on that occasion she was the first performer on stage and she rendered her songs before an audience of approximately 60,0000 people with a composure that was remarkable. Elaborating on the reason for her stage confidence Laura confided that when she is performing she does not see anything in the crowd and it is just as she is at home.

Laura's interest in singing calypso started very early:

> Well when I was small, my father used to make up nursery rhymes and I used to sing it and then one day I was sitting outside and I said Daddy I want to write a calypso and he said "Girl you Crazy"? I say something like it's true, you know, and then he helped me to write one and then I was only four years old.

Not only did she get inspiration from watching other young people who were singing calypso and saying: "I want to be like them when I grow up", but she feels that she is providing the same inspiration to other young people particularly her sister, "When I am singing at home, she knows my calypsos, she practices with me. She is two years old. I started when I was four. She has me as an inspiration."

## The Shared Voice

> Singing calypso is my life and I want to do it as long as I can. Wherever it takes me I want to go, that is it in a nutshell. I just want to be the best that I can be (Barbara).

These words set the stage for the stories which follow as the shared voice becomes a counterpoint for the unique voice which emphasized the ways in which each woman internalized and articulated the subjective experiences that shaped her interaction with the genre. As I heard the narratives unfold, as I listened to the voices, the common threads which were interwoven into the whole tapestry of human connection began to emerge, and the words of Barbara became the narrative of the group as the dialogues become imbedded in the shared culture, language and beliefs. The women provided voices that were free of dissemblance and that were unfettered by norms prescribed by others. While in some instances I inserted myself into the narrative, at the time of telling, it was in an unintrusive manner.

There were dialogues which were country specific, in the sense that the accounts revealed that only the women in the particular country had the experiences. It was clear, for example that women in Guyana had to contend with an environment that was not very supportive of the calypso singer: in both Guyana and Barbados the fact that calypso singing is seasonal has impacted negatively on the women in many cases. The disappointment and frustration which they feel is reflected in their words:

> When you go to a firm and ask them to sponsor you almost always get a negative response. Only a few are willing. The private firms should do more for us. The bands do not back us, they do not like to do anything for us. They would do anything for the other singers, like the reggae singers especially those from abroad. When we rehearse it is usually a nightmare because the members of the band do not turn up (Tina).

> I am a member of the calypsonian's Association but what I see now for the past few years we are not functioning as we should. Sometimes when the secretary calls the calypsonians for an important meeting when you turn up only two persons are there. Then again, we find it difficult at times to get proper rehearsals before we appear on a show. Then sometimes you get two rehearsals and then you have to go on stage (Faye).

> I mean, look, I've been to Trinidad out of the season and you hearing kaiso right through. You go into a bar or a restaurant, you got a man with a guitar he still doing the kaiso and they just don't do it here so that is why I say to myself that calypso is a real Trinidadian thing you know, like we are just like copy cats, but we are not in it to the fullest (Myrna).

> It's a one season thing here in Barbados right and its every year you find people coming out to check calypso. You don't really find them interested after the festival, after the festival every thing just goes down (Cassandra).

Without exception, the women emphasize that their reason for singing is their love for the art form, although in the majority of cases, family tradition is a strong influence. In the case of Juanita, her father, aunt and uncle are all seasoned performers. Betty has a number of relatives who are calypso singers and once she started to sing she knew that "she would always want to sing calypso," Myrna shares a similar point of view noting that having started, "the feeling was so good that I had to continue."

There is agreement that calypso content is important. The use of calypso to portray women in a negative light is seen as unacceptable and so are calypsos that promote only sensuous lyrics and movement which are described as "jam and wine". Connie noted:

> I don't agree with the "jam and wine" thing. I don't agree with that at all. Like myself I composed some of my own tunes, the majority, my brother did for me and there is a lot of serious things you can think about.

The youngest narrators, Laura and Betty also expressed strong views on inappropriate calypso content. Betty says, "People are singing anything nowadays. They are singing smutty tunes, but with me calypso is something which I use to bring the true meaning of something, to express something about myself or somebody." While she is not totally against it, she felt that "smut in calypso" is overdone and she insisted: "I don't like it and I won't sing it." I asked for and she gave an example of the calypsos that she sings:

*They coming too from overseas to be part of Mashramani*
*Coming in from the Caribbean, from Canada for the fiesta*
*In every colour, them foreigner*
*Guyanese too with their fancy shoe*
*On the Wall, at the Mall*
*Others early in*
*the Park*
*Before the action start*

Explaining her feelings on the issue, Laura announced that calypsonians should move away from "jam and wine" and "sing funny things or sometimes serious things." The calypso she sang at this year's Junior Calypso Monarch reflects this view and she explains her reason for singing it:

> Last year a calypsonian sang THAT AIN'T GOOD ENOUGH because many of the calypsonians were only singing "jam and wine" and it said, "don't die of frustration" and he was concerned that the calypsonians were only singing "jam and wine." This year I am the Junior Monarch and my calypso was about getting rid of the jam and wine in calypso

The women acknowledge that the inappropriate content, especially as it affects women, is mainly as a result of men still "putting women down in calypso". Myrna also lamented:

> I remember the days when people used to sing about women in the party jamming, and they jamming on women. I mean, I wonder why they do this, it's not nice to cry down women like that in song.

Sally agreed that some of the calypsos sung by men are disrespectful of women but thinks this may be so because most of the women those men meet carry themselves that way; they behave in a certain manner. Pressed for clarification she conceded that she was making a sweeping statement, but stands by her words.

The topics on which the women sing range from the didactic to the purely "party" songs. Tania proudly asserted: "I am the mother of three boys so my calypsos are always oriented around the family and my calypsos always have message". She continued:

> The song that I first won with was called Message from me Granny. It was an inspirational message which said that despite all the hardships that life will offer, you must fight on. I have done anti-drug songs. I like to do political commentary as well. I also did *Fight Back* which is another message to people. This message was, don't be complacent whatever your situation.

Tania has also done a song called *Move Back the Camera* which dealt with a topical situation. Describing the events which led to the composition of the calypso Tania said:

> We had a situation where they had opened up Parliament to the reporters, so that every Friday you would see what happens in Parliament. It reached the stage where the Parliamentarians were sort of acting with the presence of the camera. So I used the theme *There's No Business Like Show Business* and sent out the message *MOVE THE CAMERA* and get on with the task of running the nation.

The importance of using calypso as social commentary is also voiced by other women, who feel that because they are so few in numbers, it is imperative for them to express their views clearly and from a female perspective. Mary acknowledged that because so few women are singing calypso they are looked upon as singing lyrics that are "conscious". It is for this reason that she tries to deliver messages that are for women especially.

In explaining the nature of her calypsos Tina elaborated upon the importance of the patriotic as well as the social message:

> All my calypsos are messages. The first calypso I sang was entitled "Not a Blade of Grass". It was when Guyana and Venezuela had a border problem and my calypso was saying no matter what happened not a blade of grass would be ceded to Venezuela. Another calypso was about the children who were not attending school and were behaving unruly. Another calypso was about dance, about the different types of dance you have. Parents do send children to school so that they could have some education. I also sang one about how as human beings we should love one another. I also sang one bout Africa. This year I sang one about myself- what my grandmother told me when I was growing up. Those are the things I sing about and its not only me, all the calypsonians send messages through their calypso

Only a few of the women compose their own songs. Those who do not, feel that "they do not have the talent to write" and they prefer to play it safe by having others compose their calypsos and, in the majority of cases, these composers are men. Most of the women, however, insist that they keep control of the process. What does keeping control mean? It means that in most cases they select the topics. According to Tina:

> My calypsos have been composed by some of the leading male calypsonians in the country. Many times I give them the topic and I select topics which are important to me. For instance the calypso which I won the Youth Week Calypso competition in 1985, I gave the topic which was about the children who were all over the place, the parents do not care anything about them. He put it together and I sang it and fortunately I came out a winner

Although the women insist that their principles are never in jeopardy, Mary admitted that conflicts could arise and as she recounted her past experiences she conceded that she has been in situations where: "Some of the topics even though I would not have chosen them myself, I was left with no choice but having to use them because of the timing."

Commenting on the intriguing situation in Trinidad in which Tania and another female calypsonian engaged in a "war of words" in calypsos which had been composed by men, Connie does not hide her feelings on where her sympathy lies and places the blame for the debacle squarely at the feet of the man who composed one of the calypsos:

> He coulda write a song pertaining to the same thing or whatever it was he had in mind but he coulda do a better job. He write that song like...it was too victimizing. It too warrish and I wasn't expecting a man like that to write that type of song.

The male-female relationship as revealed in the narratives uncover the multi-faceted role which men play in the lives of the respondents. The men fall into several categories and these include father, husband, manager, tent manager, record producer, professional counterpart or sexual companion. For many of the women the male influence is pervasive and extends in myriad ways to their public and private lives and affects their performances. It follows therefore that, depending on the nature of the relationship, the women described men as supportive, adversarial or controlling. For the women who are married, or who are involved in common-law relationships, the husband's supportive role is critical. It is manifested several ways: helping with household duties, acting as a sounding board for problems and frustrations, providing a psychological prop when it is needed. Tina reported that during the recent calypso competition in Guyana, she was ill for most of the time and it was her husband who took care of her, ministering to her needs and encouraging her to go on stage to compete:

> I was feeling so sick and I had a fever and he took me to the hotel and give me some tablets. Then when it was time for me to go on stage he carry me back and even when I didn't want to continue he coaxed me reminding me of the prize money that I could get.

Mary and Juanita both appreciated the unstinting support of their respective husbands whose assistance at critical periods contribute to their ability to perform at the optimum level and to manage their careers, although underlying their statements was the suggestion that their spouses, as Caribbean men were acting out of character.

As Mary noted:

> It's hard juggling. I have two kids, almost nine and ten. But then again this is where you get the support of your husband. I have the type of husband who will come home and cook and clean and a lot of Bajan men ain't going to do that. So once I have that support I am fine.

Juanita concurred:

> My husband is very, very supportive. There is an unspoken law in the family that if I have to go on a show. I may have to work and when I get home I would not have enough time to prepare. My clothes would be put there my bags would be set up. So I don't have problems like "Where are you going?" or "Why are you staying so long?" I never liked to be an ordinary housewife. My husband understood that right from the beginning. If you don't establish certain things from the beginning you could get into trouble (Juanita).

However, as far as involvement and support goes, it is Renata's husband whose support spans several levels. As her mentor and manager, he makes all the decisions regarding her career, including what songs she can sing and what tent she can appear in. Renata drives her own car, but it is her husband who takes her to and from performances. She saw all of this as an expression of her husband's devotion and admits that when the criticism of her by some members of the Hindu community reached its height, it was her husband's support above all which saw her through the

crisis and as she confessed: "Once my husband is around to support me that is all I consider." When pressed however, she disclosed that although her husband has gone so far as to give interviews to the media, defending her singing and dancing on stage: "The only time he gets angry with me is if I do not cook on time for when he comes home from school, but this is not often." Does this mean that in essence she conforms to the image of "traditional" East Indian wife? It was a question which I asked Renata and she stoutly defended her position, concluding that she saw no conflict between this actuality and the reality of the sensuous, teasing person who appears on stage. According to her: "It's not a problem".

The narratives also laid bare the paternal relationship between the narrators and their fathers which in all cases appeared a felicitous one. Laura recalled that it was her father to whom she turned when at the tender age of four, she decided that she wanted to become a calypsonian, while Betty acknowledged that her father "is always there for her." Juanita also felt that it was her father's influence and reputation which worked in her favour in respect of her career as a calypsonian, noting: "Because I was my father's daughter and because I was singing chorus for him previously, I was well received. Also, I have had less problems than most. I have been blessed by his guidance. My protection has been my father."

Only two narrators volunteered information about the role and influence of their mothers. When asked, the others did indicate that maternal support was discernible. The decision by Renata to become a singer had been influenced in part, by her mother's career as a singer and her mother had been of tremendous support

to her daughter when she chose to become a calypso singer. There were similar revelations from Juanita and Faye.

The question of respect for women in calypso was raised. Some of the women were of the opinion that the entertainment world, is still looked upon as a "male environment" and that being a female, and more particularly, calypsonians in this environment, diminishes the level of respect received from the public. Barbara indicated that if she is criticized it was "behind closed doors" because no one has ever "confronted" her about her calypso singing. But she admitted: "When I was younger it was not the thing to be an entertainer. It was okay to be a doctor, lawyer, nurse and occupations of that kind of standing." Many of the other women have not fared so well. Renata saw the attack on her participation in calypso as coming from an ethnic and cultural perspective, as people from the East Indian community feel that "she is a disgrace". And for many of the other women, the public perception of calypso singing as a profession that is not "respectable" for women remained cause for concern. Sally insisted that "singing calypso is like any other profession, one must perform with dignity" and she was angered and disappointed by the "unfortunate" attitude of some members of the public. As regards her sweeping statements earlier regarding male calypsonians and the type of women they meet, Sally did not see a connection. Her retort was: "Some people get the impression that when you are appearing at shows all over the country, you are living a loose life." Warming to the subject, she continued:

> Many people feel that when a woman goes on stage to sing, she is of a certain character, she is not the person she is supposed to be. People have a definite image of show personalities and they feel that when as a woman you sing calypso, you are of a loose character. Once a few female friends came to stay at my home for a few days. When they realized that I was not what they thought I was, they reacted strangely. Comments like "But Sally, I thought you like to party. They had this feeling that because I was a female calypsonian I was a party person (Sally).

Faye and Connie described their respective experiences:

> As a matter of fact, when I started singing calypso my friends and my associates they were mad at me for singing calypso because they said "You goin turn a drunkie" and this was because they feel that calypsonians are the people who does be in the drunk places. So a lot of my friends became my enemies because I started singing calypso, but I didn't worry with them. But that is a general idea that a lot of people have about calypsonians. They feel that calypso is this vulgarity and I don't feel that this is the way (Faye).

> When I started to sing there were some people who felt that a woman singing calypso was doing something bad. I have a cousin I met him and I tell him "Cous, you know I am going to sing calypso next year" and he said "Oh! Calypso! You not supposed to do that, that is a man's work" and I got mad at him because I was looking forward for him to give me the moral support, to go forward with it, you know, and the way that he addressed me I felt bad, because as a matter of fact from that time to now, I never speak to him again (Connie).

Rhonda observed that the situation was similar in Barbados in the past, but that there has been significant change in the public's perception over the years. She said: "As far as I am concerned people in the Bajan society don't look at them [women calypsonians] no different. They don't. That was years ago when people looked at it as a kind of you know, low class thing, but now is your culture, so nobody don't look at it in that way."

Some of the narrators brushed aside the notion of disrespect, preferring to see themselves as role models, as Dawn's story of the schoolchildren demonstrates. In fact as Dawn related, the attitude of her friends regarding her entry into calypso had more to do with their realization of the hard work which calypso singing entailed and their concern for her in that respect:

> This was a question that one of my very good friends asked me,"You think you ready? You think you able with that?" Because they know in those days it was very hard.

Mary remarked that people recognized her all the time, and it gave her a feeling of pride.

It was during the narratives on relationships with men in the genre, men with whom they perform, that a certain ambivalence was apparent. The use of terms like "fight" and "arena" emerged time and time again, thereby giving the impression that they saw themselves in a combative milieu while identifying with the genre. Juanita noted that when she was only 16 she was "literally thrown into the arena with the grown-ups", who were mostly male performers. Indeed, some of the women insisted that it was a "war", referring mainly to their efforts to achieve some of the benefits that the men enjoy. Melissa emphasized that: "The women always have a hard fight" while Myrna, referring to her failure to win a major prize in calypso competition, observed succinctly:

> It's difficult for a woman, you know, to be really accepted in a male-dominated arena. So you have to fight, to fight. I have been trying ever since, but I have not been successful, but I am not giving up. I am a fighter.

Myrna took the opportunity to expand her thesis to an examination of male-female relationships in general:

> I have nothing against men, but they think that a woman's place is in the home with three and four and five babies but that can't work for me. I don't' agree with some people who think that some jobs are for men and some for women because they have women that do male jobs better than them.

Faye gave her opinion on the subject:

> Yes there is a jealousy definitely between the male and female. I don't find that it really exists as much within the calypso arena but in the general entertainment field it is there. I feel why it is not so much in the calypso is because the calypso male underestimate the female so they feel "don't mind, don't worry, we going to knock them out, we going up ahead". But when they get to realize that, "really, look, this girl is not an easy person to deal with", then the jealousy might rise, but right now they really underestimate the female, the female calypsonian in Guyana so like that you wouldn't find the jealousy reigning so much because they feel definitely they are going to beat you.

Not all of the women were willing to fit their relationship with men in this genre in a purely negative niche. Renata reacted with a philosophical shrug and the explanation that: "Well, I guess it have more man singing, so the women have to expect to get a hard time" and Mary acknowledged: "If I didn't get the support from the men I don't think I would have lasted". Sally too recalled:

> With me there was one time when I was having a lot of difficulty with the males. Not all of them some. Some persons feel that especially when you are a newcomer and you sound good, they kind of discourage you. But you wouldn't find that with all of the men, just some of them. But if you like something, you don't let others discourage you, you just go ahead.

Cassandra narrated her experiences when she first started singing and was "welcomed into the fold by the men in her tent." She explained:

> The men I find are very cordial. There is no hostility off stage, it's on stage only, They welcome you, they talk to you, they give you pointers here and there, they are willing to help because they have been there longer than we have and they can tell us where we are going wrong or where we need to improve. So I think the camaraderie is excellent. We don't have many problems. The men are willing to write for you if they see that you need assistance in writing, if they recognize that you have a strong voice and your voice may tend toward a different style, they are willing to tell you this is where you should go. I don't know if they feel threatened. I am not sure. I don't because I just see it as fun. I enjoy singing calypso, but I am not so sure if they do feel threatened. I've never heard anyone say so, but maybe deep down inside especially if we excel and they don't.

Mary also saw no cause for alarm in the male-female relationship and insisted: "They have not come across to me as being jealous. I would like to think that they would treat us equally and not feel threatened".

None of women commented directly on the issue of sexual harassment in the genre, although there were oblique references and vague allusions to the problem. Barbara flirted briefly with the subject and then retreated, allowing herself only to note that: "At times you will..well, you will get a little something but not anything that is demeaning."

I wondered whether this was a case of the "muted channel" about which Anderson and Jack speak ? Were these women unwilling to speak about something which they might have conceptualized as unacceptable? However, Connie was willing to make a bolder foray into the issue and related that she was boycotted many times by the male calypsonians: "You know, like managers from abroad would come to

select and you would be left out and they didn't have anything good to say." Sensing the opportunity, I delicately sought more details and learned that although this has not happened to Connie personally, there are times when, *she has heard*, that in order to succeed, women have had to grant sexual favours to managers, tent managers or executives of record companies. Juanita had earlier summed up the situation in a similar way claiming:

> I have heard people say that their experiences were that they encountered men who liked *them* rather than trying to help them rise in calypso and I have not had that experience because I did not have to go to look for a composition.

The women readily admitted however, that many persons in the entertainment world, mostly men, try to take advantage of them in business and there could be no doubt that when this occurred, the reason was that men perceived women as weak and vulnerable. The narrators all resolved to discourage the male view in that respect.

In a voice quivering with indignation, Dawn explained why a proposed tour overseas had not yet materialized:

> It is a question of the promoter, promoters tend to think that because you are a woman that they can get away with anything. I am one person ain't taking that at all...I don't make fun about my money because people tend to feel that they could walk over you and I can't take that. I does go out there, I know, genuine. I does willing to give of me to wake me up. And you not paying me and you want to talk to me as you want? I don't go in for that at all.

One important theme that kept recurring in the narratives was the way in which the financial aspect of calypso singing was intertwined with other facets for, although the narrators all agreed that love of calypso was an important element of their participation, there was no denying the fact that they considered financial rewards to

be a major consideration. The consensus was that calypso singing could be lucrative for the women, provided several conditions were observed. Those conditions were thought momentous and included sponsorship, the opportunity to produce recordings commercially, playing a pivotal role in marketing strategies, and the option to travel on overseas tours. It was evident that in these matters, a few of the women were in more advantageous positions than others.

In Guyana the women unhesitatingly stated that financial success was elusive and hardly likely to be achieved. This stemmed from some of the reasons which have cited earlier. As Sally underscored: "You can't make a living from singing calypso in this country, for the simple reason that most calypsonians only sing during the Mashramani period. After Mash, you mash up." Betty did not even have any idea of some of the financial opportunities that were available to her. Tina and Faye expressed similar views. Yet for those who are established, the prospects are rosier. No one was inclined to put an estimate the amount of money she earned, but as Juanita's words indicated: "Everything I have I owe to calypso"; and Connie asserted: "I was the sole provider and my family was helped by my calypso singing."

Rhonda explained:

> I've made a lot of money in calypso, but I've spent a lot too, putting out records and stuff. I feel it's a waste of time, you cannot depend on that alone and I only know of one other calypsonian who is not working at anything else. Everybody else got to work and not to say that they ain't making money but calypso can't support them.

Cassandra expressed it in the following way: "It's lucrative, but this depends on the tent that you are in. You can either make money or you can lose it." Barbara noted:

"For me it has been rewarding. It can get better but I think that will only happen as I get better. It takes time for something like that, but let's hope that one day it could happen."

Myrna and Renata both use their own money to finance their projects but have managed to become prosperous:

> A little person can't go and ask for sponsorship, they are not going to invest their money in someone that don't really say anything. It's very hard now to get sponsorship so most of my collateral is from myself and from my manager. That's how we work. But I manage to come out ahead (Myrna).

> So far, since I have started I have been financing my own project. I think it's very...it's also hard on me to finance your own record, to do you own records but I manage somehow (Renata).

Connie was convinced that for some women money was the only drawing card, and this attitude did not find favour with her. She implied that the reason why women from other ethnic groups and from the middle class had "come into calypso" was due to the financial reward which it offers. She spoke with conviction:

> Traditionally only Black women were singing. But now so many other women are singing calypso. Is the money, is the money. I know some who were ballad singers and other things and then they come into the calypso business. So the money has a lot to do with it, but you must have a love for the art.

Rhonda made a similar observation. She based her argument on that fact that generally women do not attend shows when they are not performing:

> They don' love no calypso, they have calypso shows and they don' even go. Sometimes when they have these shows I would be the only woman to go to these shows. They only into it because of the money.

As the women see it, calypso singing like other professions, requires dedication on the part of the performers, if they wish to succeed. Nevertheless, there are other specific characteristics which, combined with dedication, make the complete performer. The main themes which emerge in this regard are strength of personality, self confidence, ability to communicate with the audience and perhaps above all, proficiency at projecting sexuality without vulgarity. Myrna's view was: "Everybody can sing, but to go and face an audience, who you know nothing about, you got to be strong." Mary's words were almost identical:

> It's something you have to be born with, because believe me, getting up there in front of 500 people every night, singing kaiso and delivering a message, is not the easiest thing in the world. But you have to overlook that and think positive.

Sally also noted:

> Being a calypsonian requires a certain type of personality especially if you have to go on stage and face people. I am very brave in doing that, but you find that there are times when I am shy of people too, but I know that I have to put out something to a crowd and I am prepared, my mind is prepared to go and do it and do it of my best.

Renata described herself as a shy country girl but she knows that performing successfully on stage, requires a reversal of this personality:

> When I am outside, I am a very shy person. I am a country girl, a shy country girl, but when I am on stage forget it. I give the stage all that I have to because I know that I am an entertainer and I have to give the people what they want and I think that is why they accept me so much.

The women were eager to point out that their relationships with other women in the genre were mutually supportive and necessary, if as a class they were to develop in every respect. As Tina observed: "There is what I call friendly rivalry and generally

speaking, although we tease each other, we support one another." Myrna disclosed: "The women are very tight. It's true when you get on the big stage it's a fight on the stage, but backstage you get together and talk and you forget about what is going to happen next." Connie corroborated: "Even right now I am not singing, but if there is a female going out there, sometimes she might not know me but I would introduce myself to her and when she is finished I would tell her 'It's very nice. Keep it up, now'."

Cassandra thought that there could be more contact between the women as "we are still so few and we are all so far apart." Pointing to the example of the tent in which she performs, she said:

> I mean at the end of the whole thing everybody goes their own way. Even in our own tent. Barbara and I are in the same tent and although we have a good rapport and we get along very well and there is no hostility or anything between us, we still have separate lives and it's like that especially when you have families. When you are working you come home you look after your family and you work at home and then it's to bed and the next day the whole routine starts again. You have not time for yourself. It's sad to say but that's what happens.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the "tent" loomed large in the lives of the women and constituted a significant part of the narrative: the atmosphere in the tent, the popularity of the tent, the calibre of the calypsonians in the tent; but there was a remarkable difference between the voices of the women from Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados where the tradition is entrenched, and those from Guyana where no such tradition exists. Many felt that being in the right tent is the key to success. Indeed, many a successful career had been launched in the tent and fondness combined with pride filtered through the voices of the women when they referred to

"their" tent. Mary enthused: "The rapport is totally wonderful. I think that is what encouraged me to go on from year to year as I have been." Because the tent is so important in their lives, many of the women considered that an all-female tent, managed by women and with women performers to be something that should be pursued, but, so far they had not been able to transform their ideas into reality. Connie was optimistic:

> What I am looking forward to and hoping, you know, hoping to see one day soon, is that there is a calypso tent with females alone. Having a female tent with nice calypsos going down. They would pull a crowd.

Mary was not so sure that the women are ready for this move because as she lamented: "To say yes would be fooling myself. We are not totally accepted yet, you know, to make a step like that we would have to really prove ourselves.

However Barbara provided a different perspective:

> It is a good idea but it is something that you have to build upon. The idea is interesting but whether I think I would want to have a separate tent I don't know. I am not too keen about that. It sort of separates everything. Here we are fighting to be part of...not separate and we saying that we are equal and we can be equal in the same tent. To have a separate entity would be saying that they are on their own and they want to prove a point, as opposed to saying equality, that would be saying liberation, sort of thing. That is not what I want. I don't want to say we are more than.. we are not more than... we are the same.

Faye was the only woman at the time to head a tent, but as she admitted, it was not as successful as she would wished, owing to her lack of experience. Nonetheless because it was the first such venture in Guyana, she was proud that it is a woman who had taken the initiative. As she said:

> I heard a lot of the calypso tents in Trinidad but I never really went to one, but I found out what it is all about and I decided to carry on a calypso tent. It is my personal tent and I am glad that it is a woman who has done it, so I plan to continue it

The concept of women doing something that is entirely theirs, that is, managed and controlled by them, fired the imagination of many of the narrators. Many referred to, and expressed admiration for, the initiative taken by Dawn, Melissa, Tania and Desiree. They saw it as a declaration of women's strength and autonomy:

> What I mean is this, take those four girls, they are on the right track. What I like about them is...the one thing I like about them is which is a very nice approach. You know those girls are singing together and if you don't want one you don't get any of them. Because if you take one, you separating them, right. If not, you have to take one and the other three have to answer chorus in that appearance, fine. But when you separate them, then one has to go to one tent and the other one will have to go to another tent and I agree with them so much. I love them for this, which if I saw them I would look for them and congratulate them (Connie)

> I have been inspired by Dawn. She is strong, really strong, very, very strong and having that association with Tania, Melissa, and Desiree, it helps. It's difficult when you don't have that kind or relationship to build on, but being with them all the time it helps to build the character and she is very, very strong. If I could be like her maybe I would get where everybody else wants to be, but if you don't have that association it's very difficult, it's very unlikely that you can do it alone. I would need something like that (Cassandra)

Cassandra had also been giving thought to an all-female concept, but in terms of a calypsonians' association, which she hoped would become a reality shortly:

> We've been crying out for it for ages, but I think the difficulty is one of power, I guess. Probably people will want to know well who is going to run it. The tent managers have theirs and they are the ones who fight on our behalf but I think we need to have our own eventually and try to get the benefits for ourselves. I have tried to motivate one or two of the women but I don't think the women are quite yet ready. We tried at the end of last year, we tried to get

> everybody together but as I said it was very difficult because of the schedules, everybody's schedule was not the same. But I have not given up on the ideas as yet. I have quite a few plans for it, right back down to logos, jewellery, everything, It's just there sitting, just waiting for the right moment. I feel that if the females are in control of their own destiny, we will eventually surface to the top of the arena. We just need to be able to control it.

It was the first time the question of power was raised overtly, although the notion had danced tantalizingly in and out of the narratives on several occasions. I took the opportunity to seek clarification on the issue and I introduced the topic at some of the other meetings. From these later revelations, it seemed that power had several meanings for the narrators. Mostly, it was equated with independence which emanated from financial security, but it appeared that this could not be obtained if women did not have control. It seemed like *circulus per circulum*: an endless circle.

Myrna summed it up when she articulated some of the reasons why more women are not singing calypso: "Finances, that could be one, someone to push them to encourage them, that could be another and guts, you got to have guts. In a male-dominated arena, you got to be with it."

The women were very outspoken on the question of their trail-blazing role and pride rang through the voices. Most of them expressed the view that they should be regarded as professional women and career women, who provide inspiration for other women wishing to enter the field. Renata, in particular, thought that other East Indian women would like to sing calypso but they had witnessed the hostile reception which she got and were prepared to wait:

> What I am hearing is that a lot of Indian woman would like to come into it and I think they should, but right now I am paving the way and making the way for them to come in and the person who does that always has a hard time. I don't know how the crowd will handle it and I don't know how they will handle it. I have had to cope with the criticism all the way and it was difficult.

Speaking on her own behalf and for the rest of her group Dawn offered encouragement:

> We paving the way. We giving them knowledge. We showing them that if they want to come out there they must like the art and when you love the art that is all you need, you don't need anything else.

When it came to the question of giving counsel to the women wishing to make that important step into the world of calypso singing, there were many words of advice that were remarkably similar. Women were urged to be positive and to grasp available opportunities:

> They must realize that it is an ego-booster, a confidence booster. It really does boost your confidence. You learn to break down some barriers, even some personal barriers, but they must also know that they have to sing something with a message. Take advice and take criticism and use that criticism constructively (Mary).

> Well, I would tell her, think positive. Give it your all, do your best, don't let anything get in your way. You going to do something, do it with a meaning. There are people out there that are going to cry you down, don't mind them, if you got it in you to do it, just go ahead and do it (Myrna).

> You are going to be watched and people out there are going to ridicule you. You have to learn not to listen to what they are saying unless of course it's constructive. You have to learn to shut them out and just go out there and do what you can (Barbara).

> Well one thing I would tell her is that one, you have to be a very strong-headed person and to be in this field isn't easy because somebody always want to push you around because they feel that ah..that is another coming and they have a thing they does say around

> the calypso tent, Don't care how good yuh song might be and yuh is a newcomer this is only one year and you not bound to see them come another year again. But whatever you do, do of your best and if you like this and you want to live by this, keep putting your best foot forward (Connie).

Juanita expressed it just as forcefully, and added a new dimension as well:

> First of all, if you want to be a female calypsonian, you must love to sing calypso. That is all important. Never be afraid to approach the highest people in the land. Never say "Oh, I am a woman and they won't see me." Strive for excellence always. Stay away from drugs. Eat healthy foods and have a healthy disposition and you should be fine.

There was however, a sobering observation from Faye:

> I left my job as a teacher and came to sing calypso but I wouldn't advise another woman to do the same thing. I regret leaving my job because it was too hard. I had a great fight. Now I have reached a standard that I don't worry with the teaching any more but from there to now, it was very hard and I wouldn't advise anybody to leave their job and do singing unless you are very sure that from her on it is up the ladder.

There was concurrence that successful live performances and by extension, overall success in the genre, depend on the rapport or, as Melissa described it the "connection" which the performers establish with their audiences. But the women expressed different views on how this could be achieved. Since I had seen some of the women perform, I asked about the importance of stage costumes. The narrators agreed that they are indeed an important part of the display within the total communication structure, which includes choreography:

> I always wear special costumes because I believe that singing is not just singing. You cannot be singing about Africa and you are wearing a suit and tie and things like that you have to portray what you are singing about and sometimes even if at a certain part of your words might not come out so clear but because of the way you dress the message is clear. So presentation is important. I do my own choreography and

> costuming. Well this year I have a professional dancer who has assisted in the choreography for this dance and she has given me an ease there, but for the previous times all the choreography I've done myself (Faye).

> I have special stage clothes. It depends on what I am singing. I usually dress to suit. Last year I sang a song called **Culture Gone** and my dress was really cultural. You know the broad rimmed hat and the big shirt with the rolled up sleeves and the skirt and the software and stuff like how we would dress, culturally you know. It puts over where you are coming from. Now I would not go and sing a song like **Culture Gone** dressed in a jacket and have your (sic)curls flying all over and thing. I had my head tied, and so I usually dress to suit the song (Myrna).

Renata proudly asserted: "I design my costumes. I like doing that. I have somebody who sews for me and she helps with a few little things. Some of the time, I buy and sometimes I design."

There was some discussion on "sexuality in performance". Connie regarded her work as an exotic dancer in a pragmatic light, noting that it was done in order to help her support her family. Dawn was not averse to evoking a certain sensuality with her performances and she said: "I love going on stage and making people laugh, so that I will be up on stage and sometimes doing a serious song and making eye contact with somebody, it's all a part of the performance". Renata also thought that her popularity with audiences stemmed in part, from her ability to "jump on and off the stage" and to interact with the "people in the crowd." In stating her approach Mary affirmed:

> I am known for dealing with my crowd one on one. A lot of the women I notice, they sing but they sing above the heads of the people. I sing and I look at you. I point you out so that for example when I sing the song **WHERE HAVE ALL THE GOOD MEN GONE**? the men could stand up and say "Look at me. I'm here. So yes, I deal with my audience.

Yet it was Mary who warned against "too much gyrating on stage" suggesting that "Bajan women don't like that" because:

> They have their man sitting next to them and their man is watching you saying how good you look. And it happens they automatically hate you. I mean it's not your fault, you look good, but this is what can happen.

Competitions are very much a part of the calypso world and the prestige which winning these contests confers on the victors is very well underscored by the voices of the narrators who have all at one time or another, entered contests at the national or regional level. However, as the narratives indicate, entering a competition means more than just pitting skills against other calypsonians male or female or winning a monetary award. It is an opportunity for self-expression and self-identification. Betty's voice reflected the pride that she felt because "she had not only won the Junior calypso title twice and has placed second on three occasions", but she has also entered the national competition, competing against senior males and females. Laura confided that her friends treated her differently when she won the Junior Calypso Monarch competition and that her father was so pleased that he "threw her up in the air." At times, the women's words indicated that they felt they had been unfairly treated in competition on account of their gender. The narrators were confident that their ability would eventually get them to the top of the ladder: they would not allow minor setbacks to deter them. However, for some, competing in this atmosphere had left its scars as Rhonda's experiences have shown, and even before her health problems forced her to retire from calypso singing, Connie had suffered enough as far as competition was concerned. She recalled:

> Well the last competition I entered I came third. That was the Female Calypso Competition. It was somewhere in the 1980s...1986 I think. I came third. Since that time, I never go back into the competition. Plus, the man of that competition said to me "Connie, you've been robbed. I don't think you should ever go back in a competition. He even made a little wisecrack to say "Is shame they shame that they didn't put you out. They had was to give you third anyway. And within my heart I feel I was robbed so I never entered. I had better thoughts after then, I never go back in a competition again. I tell myself this is it. I not supposed to go out there and try to please six people which is the judges. I supposed to go out there to please my fans and friends. They were pleased. The crowd got on very bad there that night.

Faye also recalled her successes and failures in competition:

> Well, I participated in the um...national competition. That was my first contest. I participated in 1984. I didn't um.. get very far for the first year. I was, what you would say a drop out in the quarter finals but the tune was good so they me asked to sing a guest appearance in Linden at the semi-finals and I was very mad at the semi-finals when I did the guest appearance because I had two songs prepared like you always do, and after preparing to sing one song they started playing the other tune so I was like...that threw me off. So since I started I always come with dancing girls and I always have dancing girls or boys to essentially pick what I am singing about and they were prepared for one thing and then was this trip up and I cried the whole night. It was very hard, but then the calypsonians there and then were very supportive of me they sang for me they cheered me up and I was encouraged to come back the next year and it was that year that I won the National competition. There were two contests, the female and the overall contest. That was in 1985, just one year after coming in.

The attitude taken by the majority of the narrators was that it was only a question of time before their efforts would be rewarded, although the fact that the number of men singing far exceeds the number of women makes the climb to the summit more competitive. Nevertheless, the women had no doubt that when the "moment" should have arrived, they would be ready for it. Renata explained that all her energies were directed toward the goal of "winning the big one" and that when it happens it

will be an indication that she "has arrived". Juanita was confident that when she reached the "finals" her past experiences would come in handy.

Indeed, some narrators seemed more concerned about the threat that calypso faces from other forms of music, especially "dub" music which they see both as a foreign and a negative influence on the youth of the Region. Myrna noted that calypso is appreciated by the more mature audiences the youths are "more into the dub thing". It was a concern that was articulated by many of the women. Tina, Faye and Stella were particularly upset at the pervasiveness of the problem in Guyana. Tina saw it as a part of a wider problem in the society which tended not to recognize "their own." She offered some suggestions:

> I think that the Department of Culture should do something about it. They should enlist the service of some of the older calypsonians who are no longer singing and have them go to the schools and start to educate the younger children about their own culture. Education is a very important part of the whole thing.

Mary placed the responsibility on the education system to play the role, for as she anticipated: "The schools can help I am sure, by highlighting the positive aspect. It would be good if the schools can include something of the calypso in the curriculum." Other narrators also stated their views on the role of the education system:

> I feel we could have workshops and like shows around the country and we could educate people about what calypsos and calypsonians are all about so that people wouldn't run away with the wrong ideas about us. We can also incorporate it into the education system, through the schools (Faye ).

> I see the schools playing a very vital role because of the age groups that they incorporate. I think it should start from the Montessori aspect, where you would encourage the child to become involved in drama. Tell the child to look at something and sing about it. I think

> calypso should be on the school curriculum. You should not allow people from other countries to have Pan in schools and we don't have it. That's happening right now. What we have is not fully developed. I am not pleased with the development o f it so far. Show the children that calypso can be financially viable, because it is (Juanita).

In sum, as the woman reflected on the course their lives had taken in the world of calypso, there was unanimity on one point: that calypso would continue to be an important part of their future. But perhaps, even more importantly there was the affirmation that if they had to live their lives over and were given a choice they would still choose the very genre. Myrna's words encapsulated the women's feelings on the issue: "I don't agree with some people who think that some jobs are for men and some for women because they have women that do male jobs better than them."

# CHAPTER V111: LEARNING FROM THE VOICES

> Attempting to learn from voices highlights the contention that the very act of interpretation requires us to choose among the multiple identities and associations shaping a life, and that addressing context involves understanding the meaning of a life in its narrator's frame of reference and making sense of that life from the different and necessarily comparative frame of reference of the interpreter. (Personal Narratives Group 1991:19)

The preceding chapter transformed the narratives into a text that has allowed us to see how the women organized their voices into personal historicity, and the ways in which they used that historicity to create their particular view of reality in the society in which they live. The women's words have been used extensively. It has also been an attempt do what Grumet describes as: "Return a story to the teller that is both hers and not hers, that contains her self in good company" (Grumet 1991:70). However, for the researcher, these "tales of the field" are not the final stage, and do not constitute the findings, but rather serve to ground the narratives in order to provide an understanding of the connecting and transformational processes which undergird them. Therefore, in interpreting the narratives the connections have to be made between the voices and the temporal and social forces that shaped them.

## Paradoxical Propositions

Two images of the Caribbean woman are usually presented for scrutiny: that of the passive, acquiescing and complacent person who over the years has submitted to male domination and the other of the strong, nurturing person who has been the mainstay of her family. Research on the history and development of the woman in

the Caribbean has made it clear that the latter notion is the one to be encouraged, presenting the woman as one who has had to adapt to conditions and circumstances which for the most part have been formidable (Clarke 1957; Ellis 1986; Massiah 1989; Mathurin 1975). The findings of this research not only support this notion but they recognize that within each woman's story there are different emphases which reveal the way in which she defines her "self" positively in relation to the various roles which she is called upon to fulfil. The stories uncover the complexities that undergird the lives of Caribbean women and the paradoxes that are interwoven into these lives.

Relations of gender have played a significant part in the lives of Caribbean women, determining the ways in which gender roles have been conceptualized. Thus, women's family roles, their labour market participation, their access to education and their relationships with males have all been affected by the ideology of male supremacy. Despite attempts to redress this situation and to improve the overall condition of women, as Massiah points out:

> In many respects, Caribbean women find themselves in a seemingly contradictory position. Contradictory in the sense that strategies for improving the development status of the territories are available to both men and women, but the ability of women to benefit from those strategies is circumscribed as much by the pervasive character of the socio-economic structure as by the ambivalent attitudes of the males who dominated the structure. (1986:159)

Other researchers have pinpointed similar ambivalences and contradictions in women's position. Drayton and Cole-Georges (1992) concur that pre and post independence national policies, aimed at equality of education, benefitted girls, who

took greater advantage of these opportunities than boys. Nevertheless, they point to the limited access of women to policy making in education, noting that despite the increased number of women qualified for leadership and policy making positions, women continue to be under represented at these levels, with the regional universities being glaring examples of the effects of discriminatory policies. Leo-Rhynie and Hamilton (1983) note a similar trend in respect of women in other professions in Jamaica.

What does it mean to be a female calypso singer? This is the question for which I sought answers at the start of the journey. As each narrative unfolded and became imbedded in the larger story, the issues that impacted upon the lives of the women on an individual and on a shared basis, emerged to illuminate and uncover not only a coherent story of women's experiences as calypso singers, but also the multi-layered texture of their lives. The result therefore, is that the voices are not merely a compilation of stories, only interesting to a specialized audience; rather they enrich our understanding of the lives of women in the Region.

The narratives of the 17 women involved in this study brought to the fore the many issues that were of paramount concern to them. For the most part, these issues centred around gender relations; gender role perceptions; and the dynamics of power relations between men and women, and again they illuminated some of the contradictions and paradoxes to which reference was made earlier. Particularly pertinent were the issues of male-female relationships and women's familial role. It was evident that the women's relationships with men did not follow a set pattern,

but rather were dictated by the affiliation of the parties concerned. The paternal relationship was a felicitous one in which support and encouragement were the key elements but other male-female relationships did not always conform to this pattern.

Indeed, the relationship between women and their spouses proved to be complex as well as paradoxical. While in most instances the marital relationship was one in which there was mutual support, particularly if the partner was also in the musical field, there were also cases where the women were subjected to reactions caused by male domination. There was at least one situation in which this support was lacking and the narrator reported that although her husband was aware of the demands of her occupation before they were married, he nevertheless objected to the fact that she had to be away from home so often and for such long hours. This problem may have been rooted in the fact that in the Caribbean there are certain expectations of gender roles in the household and while it is not considered unusual for the male to have a job that takes him away from the family for long periods at a time, the same is not always true for the woman. It may be assumed that the male partner in this case was not happy with the reversal of roles and the implication that he was not in control of the situation.

Few of the narrators volunteered information about the role of their mothers and those who did, referred mainly to emotional support. This seemed to indicate that although the mother plays an important social and economic role in the family, the women in the study felt that it was the father, with his perceived advantage in the power structure who could be depended upon to advance their careers.

Ellis (1986) argues that women in the Caribbean are unique in the way that they have explored and adopted strategies for coping and survival. As she notes, "they are involved in a variety of social networks that provide support and function as support systems on which they can draw in times of need" (1986:10). Not surprisingly, some of the women were forced to employ some of these strategies in order to balance their role of wife and mother with that of that a calypso singer. It was often a question of being able to weave a delicate path between family duties and professional demands. Connie, as the sole bread-winner in her family had been forced to go to extraordinary lengths to hold her family together, finally turning to neighbourhood networks to provide assistance. Although in the end the outcome was favourable, she admitted that leaving her children behind while she went out to work, was not without its psychological pitfalls.

Research on women's familial role has pointed to their central position and while many of the women in the study saw the integrity of the family as important, they were equally determined to maintain their independence and were not willing to define their existence only in terms of the male perspective. In the case cited above, where the husband was unwilling to accept the fact that his wife's work might call for a re-ordering or re-adjustment of household duties, the reaction of the narrator was to walk away from the marriage. In another instance, the narrator noted that while she was very happy in her marriage, she viewed the institution of marriage as an arrangement in which women needed to manage themselves and develop the ability to fit their family in without neglecting them.

The contention by Anderson that "the general conviction of Caribbean women that they are equal to men is nonetheless accompanied by an acknowledgment of the existence of male domination" (1986:308) was confirmed by the attitude of many of the narrators. As a consequence, although one of the recurring themes in the narratives was the extent to which women in calypso were overshadowed by men, some of the women were resigned to that fact, seeing it as symptomatic of the prevailing gender ideology that not only justified the relations between the genders but which invidiously conveyed a valuative framework that identified appropriate behaviours for men and women.

Although the dominance of the men should not have been unexpected, given the overwhelming numbers of men and the range of areas in which their authority was paramount, nevertheless the revelations of the power dynamics between men and women were startling, to say the least. First of all, there was no official barrier to the participation of women as performers and administrators, yet they were conspicuously absent from the occupancy of some of the administrative positions such as tent managers, managers of performers, and the key creative positions including record producers, and composers. These positions the ones which conferred power, status and influence in the calypso industry and the exclusion of women from active participation in the business aspect also prevented them from becoming major beneficiaries of a burgeoning commercial market in which calypso has become a high revenue activity bringing considerable financial rewards to those who can take advantage of the opportunities that are offered. Only in a few instances were the

women willing to meet that challenge head on and demand that they be included.

While much attention has been paid to direct formal power by which men control women such as discriminatory marriage rights and laws, one must also look to the concept of social power, which some anthropologists have defined as the ability of a person or group to influence others through various forms of control - control that is often exerted through threat of withdrawal of resources (Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). In the case of women in calypso the power and the control exerted by men were manifested on stage where, in the view of the narrators, men were always given an unfair advantage and where there was a differentiation in the value of performances given by men and by women with the result that performances at competitions were not always judged on merit. In addition, calypsos composed and sung by men reflected an insensitivity to issues that were of concern to women such as the family, sexual violence and sexual harassment. and although many of the narrators saw this as another facet of the power relationship, the fact that men composed many of the calypsos sung by women highlighted another contradiction.

However, it would not be inappropriate to note that other investigations into the influence and power of women in musical endeavours, suggest that this phenomenon is not unique to calypso, but that it is also found in areas such as rock music and rap music (Brandt 1985; Groce and Cooper 1990; Harding and Nett 1984; Roberts 1991). According to Harding and Nett despite the fact that the number of women singers [in rock music] has increased, the enterprise is almost exclusively

male-dominated and few women hold executive positions.

Rothfield (1990) notes that the possession and control of women's bodies by men has enjoyed historical continuity in form if not in content. Certainly an examination of the development of male-female relations in the Caribbean, pinpoints the ways in which, from the earliest epochs, women have been forced to relinquish control over their bodies in return for the granting of favours and gifts. In most cases, these actions were economically generated, although during the days of slavery, the refusal of the female slaves to grant such favours may have meant the difference between life and death. The narrators were upset by the experiences of some women in calypso which seemed to point to a perpetuation of this attitude despite the new consciousness of women in the society. It seemed worrisome that women had not yet been able to escape this aspect of control by men.

The fact that there was a general recognition of the male dominance might lead to the assumption that women in the genre would support each other fully, yet this was not always the case. One narrator was convinced that she had not received the support of her peers at a time when, according to her story, the treatment that had been meted out to her in the calypso scene was not only unjust but gender-related. The narrator made the interesting observation that she had received the support and encouragement of the "upper class" but in her own words, "the lower class women were something else".

The ambivalence which many narrators experienced with regard to the entry into the genre of more "middle-class" women. seemed related to the history of calypso which has traditionally been seen a "black" endeavour regardless of the gender of the performer, and moreover, one in which members of the middle and upper class did not participate. Thus, although the women could have been pleased at the elevated status that the calypso, *ipso facto* the performers, seemed to be enjoying, instead they regarded the appearance of the other class groups as an intrusion. They did not see participation in the genre as a "breakdown" of class barriers, rather they expressed the view that the female performers in question were "into the thing" because of the financial rewards. It is only in Trinidad and Tobago that the phenomenon is noticeable and although the numbers are still small, the narrators, who were mainly black, were unanimous in their rejection of the trend. On the other hand, they expressed satisfaction that members of the East Indian community were showing an interest in participating in the genre.

The situation in which the narrator was of East Indian origin not only provided considerable interest but also perhaps the greatest paradox. In fact, the literature on the East Indian woman in the Caribbean reveals a situation that is paradoxical. Poynting reveals that:

> The experience of Indian women during the indenture period was one of multiple oppression: as an indentured worker in a system of quasi-servitude, as an Indian whose culture was despised as barbaric and heathen by all other sections of the population, and as a woman who suffered from the sexual depredations of the white overseer class within the reconstituted 'Indian' family structure. (1987:231-232)

The same author points out that although as wage earners under indenture some Indian women earned a measure of independence, it was one that was short-lived as towards the end of the indenture period "the precarious independence of [East] Indian women began to be curtailed" (1987:233). In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the access of East Indian women to education was limited and although this trend has now been reversed, many East Indian women today are seen as living a relatively sheltered life and both in the home and in the public, the man ostensibly takes the leading role. Yet it has been implied that the East Indian woman is more influential than is realized, especially in the home. Referring to the situation in Trinidad and Tobago, Mohammed (1988) suggests that in both Hindu and Moslem families, while the men may still see themselves as the patriarchal head of the family, many women are in a position to challenge the old order.

However, the participation of East Indian women in singing and dancing activities is mostly confined to such activities related to the Indian culture, and in the normal course of things, the women do not perform in a public environment in which overt sexuality is widespread. Not surprisingly therefore, an East Indian woman who is a calypso singer is regarded as anathema by members of the orthodox East Indian community and the narrator was subjected to vilification by the Hindu community of which she was a member.

The husband was willing to permit his wife to perform on stage, but he remained in control at both the domestic and professional spheres as if thereby signalling that certain cultural aspects of the Indian family were still being

maintained. The narrator in turn, although she had an upwardly mobile career which would, under any circumstances, have categorized her as a successful person, confirmed that she was under the total control of her husband and would not have it any other way, thus maintaining the image of the East Indian woman as dutiful wife and mother.

Koskoff (1987) supports the proposition that power dynamics between social classes, ethnic and racial groups, and especially between men and women have profoundly affected the composition and performance of music in virtually all societies and this was clearly discernible in this study. How were these dynamics manifested in the world of calypso? As indicated earlier, the stratification of the post-emancipation Caribbean society saw the descendants of slaves who were primarily black and the descendants of indentured servants who were mostly East Indian origin occupying the lower rung of the social ladder. In ascending social order were the mulatto or coloured members of the population and the white inhabitants. The modern society has seen a modification in the demarcation of these social strata, largely as a result of educational and economic opportunities that are available to members of the society.

Nettleford (1989) notes in the Caribbean the common people whose music, dance, theatre and oral literature rank them amongst the greatest of artists in the Region, continue in their myriad acts of creativity under all sorts of [adverse] conditions (1989:239). The study found that notwithstanding the recognition of the calypso as a major expression of the Region's culture, and its role in the

identification of the Caribbean as an important centre of popular music, there was a continued pervasiveness of social and cultural forces that depict calypso singing as an occupation that was not respectable, therefore those who were performers fell into a similar category. The repercussions of this viewpoint were felt by the women in particular, some of whom pointed to the negative comments which had been made about their participation in calypso singing and the inference that they were engaged in an occupation that was not "proper".

This attitude no doubt has its genesis in the reaction of the society of earlier days and the bawdiness and wantonness which characterized calypso singers and especially the women in calypso. Therefore despite the recognition that these days are long past, there is still the reluctance of some persons to relinquish the image of the woman in calypso as "the temptress" whose sole aim is to entice men into behaviour that is morally reprehensible. Further, although the manifestation of this attitude was most prevalent in Guyana, it was also discernible, albeit to a lesser extent, in Barbados but it was hardly seen in Trinidad and Tobago.

The narrators expressed disappointment at these negative representations to which they were subjected and especially the impression of immorality and lasciviousness which it raised. However, as Wood (1980) argues in societies where the main patrons of musical performance are male, musical behaviours that heighten feminine sexuality are the norm. The disapproval which the women experience may therefore be contextualized in the light of the obvious sexuality that is exhibited in some of their performances. The suggestion that the objections to the women's

sexuality in performance were mainly from women and Mary's assessment of the behaviour of wives and girlfriends in the tent when they saw the women singing on stage have to be seen within this context.

Some of the women were not unduly bothered by this negative image because they felt that it was only held by a small proportion of the society, and there were others who felt that the only way to dispel the notion was by setting an example of rectitude, yet there seemed to be the conviction that double standards were being applied in this regard since the same types of behaviour by male performers were considered acceptable. Again, however, this reaction that was more discernible in Guyana than in the other two territories.

## Implications of the Study

The implications of the study go beyond the actions of the women themselves who are not cocooned in the world of calypso but are part of the wider environment. The nature and causes of the perpetuation of prevailing ideologies of gender must be seriously addressed and new processes must be put in place that will bring about a fully conscious, direct process of change to the current situation as women are drawn from the periphery to "centre stage."

If it is conceded that calypso is a voice that holds the society up for inspection, then the society must present an image that is as flawless as may be possible. To achieve this, it must enlist the assistance of all the structures of power at its disposal: economic, social, cultural and political. It has been argued elsewhere in this study that in the early history of the Caribbean, education was used not only as a means

of social control but that the access of women to what was offered was limited and that the provisions made for their education were inferior to those for men. Indeed, it may be contended that the ideologies influencing educational provision for women or lack thereof, were so pervasive that the belief that the woman's place was in the home and that her true vocation is that of wife and mother have not entirely been swept away by the tides of social and economic change.

Reinforcing the point, Ellis suggests that it is extremely difficult for women to break with traditions, to challenge the customs and myths about their place in their societies especially since "by and large the education that Caribbean women have received has not equipped them for such a task" (1986:100). It is clear then, that the school as one of the chief reproducers of social relations must take a major role in this regard, leading the way by providing curricula and instruction that eschew the patriarchal ideology. Further, the entire education system at the formal, informal and non-formal levels must be reoriented to the purpose of ensuring that programs reflect the new ideology.

The literature has revealed that Third World women and women of colour have had to battle against the hegemony of a white, male world. The women's movement, ergo, feminism is slowly becoming a major factor in the lives of women of the Caribbean. However, for the majority of these women who have performed and continue to perform a multiplicity of roles in the home and outside and who have laboured under severe economic and social burdens for several years, feminism

is seen as the preserve of middle and upper class women. Thus, it is not a harbour in which they wish to seek refuge.

It is here that the role of women's organizations becomes a critical one. Historically, these organizations have been managed by and for women, assisting them to address the problems caused by their social and economic condition. The emphasis must now be not only on developing strategies to cope with the oppressive structures, but also on identifying the consciousness on which they need to draw in order to move away from a situation of powerlessness to one in which their creativity would provide the springboard for their accession to a meaningful and productive place in society.

## Looking Beyond the Voices

Gender ideology may be one of the major factors that influences the occupational experiences of women in calypso, yet in the final analysis, in spite of the obstacles that they face, women are availing themselves of the opportunity to reclaim their voices. However, hearing the voices propelled me into thinking about other questions: Did the determination of the women to "reclaim their voices" mean that there would in future be a voice that would be easily identifiable as a female calypso voice? What would or could that voice project? To what extent if at all, would a more equitable balance of power result in revised goals and aspirations of the women?

The response to some of these questions may be generated by future research. For now, it can be said that there is still an undeniable overlap of the male and

female repertoire and in some cases male sexual challenge is being answered by a female voice, but in many ways, this was linked to the realization that commercial success was dependent upon market demands. Yet, as the narratives indicated, there are signs that the women have already begun to deliver a "female" message through their lyrics which stress the importance of the need for women to be mutually supportive and strong, and which encourage them to engage in a "politics of resistance" aimed at reducing not only their marginalization in the genre and in the society, but also at the same time lessening their dependence on men.

It is to be hoped that the women's voice will put a new aesthetic into the calypso, inserting a higher moral standard and getting the market to respond, at the same time serving notice on the male singers that the latter will no longer enjoy absolute power to disrespect women in song and arbitrarily dump what they want on the market.

## A Final Retrospective

Lather proposes that "dialectical practices require an interactive approach to research that invites reciprocal reflexivity and critique, both of which guard against the central dangers to praxis-oriented empirical work: imposition and reification on the part of the researcher (1991:59). In approaching this study, I made a conscious decision to use the medium of the personal narrative to uncover the stories of the women in calypso and to employ a strategy of collaboration for obtaining the stories. At the same time, I acknowledged that Caribbean researchers before me had also struggled with the question of methodology and had used the stories told by women

to shed new light on women's experiences in the Caribbean (Barrow 1986; Brodber 1986; Durant-Gonzalez 1986; Sistren 1987).

However, this does not absolve me from applying a reflexivity that will encompass the research process, for as Silvestrini (1989) iterates, "Lives, as manifestations of women's voices, become an indispensable part of our historical reality. In many cases they provide the only text on which we can depend to reconstruct the history of women" (1989:3).

Had my approach succeeded in providing a text that did indeed capture the essence of the women's lives? S. Smith notes that "often life stories emerge through acts of collaboration that bring together a subject who narrates her or his story orally and another subject who collects, transcribes, organizes, and edits that story" (1993:398) but acknowledges that "collaborative projects raise complex questions about who speaks in the text and whose story is being told, about who maintains control over the narrative and by implication over the purposes to which the story is put" (1993:399). In retrospect, therefore, the issue of the dynamics between myself as the researcher, and the women as the teller of the stories, becomes important. McRobbie sees this issue as one of the most sensitive in research, pointing to the potential of "a relationship paralleling in its unequal power that of social worker and client, or teacher and pupil" (1982:51). However as Olson and Shopes argue we, as researchers, also wonder if, "in our own sensitivities to inequality, we indulge ourselves a bit and perhaps overestimate our own privilege, even our own importance, in the eyes of the people we interview" (1991:197). Certainly the

narrators were not overwhelmed or intimidated by my presence and if at times, I might have been tempted to let a certain authority on my part enter the process, I was always cognizant that they too held authority by retaining the right to gratify or deny my request for answers. In the final analysis, I am convinced that the stories I heard were generated by the women's true feelings and emotions and were not sanitized for my benefit. I am also encouraged by the fact on my second field trip to Guyana, I was sought out by the women in calypso who invited me to be a part of their campaign to gain more recognition within the Association of Calypsonians. I was honoured by the request as it meant that they did not see me as someone who was isolated from their struggle, and it allayed any fears that I had concerning the ways in which they envisaged my utilization of their experiences.

There still remains the issue of the way in which the text was written. There are many ways to write a woman's life. In this study, I have exercised my prerogative as the researcher to bring to the fore the women's voices; thus I have been liberal with my use of their words, hoping in this way to bring to the reader the depth of the emotions which I, as the listener was able to detect.

But the journey does not end here. The stories of the women have forced me to acknowledge other matters which surfaced, related to the transformational nature of the research. McRobbie asserts that "for feminists engaged in research, historical, anthropological, literary, sociological or otherwise, there is really no problem about answering the question, 'Who do we do feminist research for?' Yet to simply state

that it is for women is to obscure a whole range of issues which invariably rise to the surface in the course of a research project"(1982:47).

In addition, Hawkesworth maintains that "the politics of knowledge must remain a principal concern of feminist analysis, not only in the course of examining malestream thought but also in determining the most fruitful avenues for feminist research" (1989:59). She contends that "in confrontations with power, knowledge and rational argumentation alone will not secure victory, but [women] can use them strategically to subvert male dominance and to transform oppressive institutional policies and practices" ( 1989:557).

One of the questions I must ask myself therefore, is "What will I or what can I do with this account in order to make it go beyond an academic text and become a political product that can serve as a vital entry point for examining the individual and society in the construction of gender"? One answer is that I must involve these women and others in a process that will focus on gendered self-identity and on the relationship between self and society. Therefore, as a first step, I envisage a meeting of the persons involved in the study and other researchers, with the primary aim of examining the arguments which it generated and determining areas for action. Other activities, both academic and social/political will flow from this step.

## The End of the Journey

There can be no doubt that the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean have undergone far-reaching political and economic changes since the colonial experience which left them with fragile economies, inadequate infrastructure, poverty

and dependence. They have also not been immune to the dramatic changes in geo-political patterns and economic orders which have characterized the world in recent years. Today, one of the dilemmas of these countries is to find a way to retain their independence, sovereignty and cultural identity in the face of these changes, and there is growing awareness of the need for a development strategy that prizes not only efficiency in the use and management of natural resources but one in which creativity and innovation are recognized as critical. As I listened to the voices of the women for one last time, it seemed to me that rather than fading away into the distance, they were instead getting stronger as they signalled their commitment to women and womanhood. Nueles-Bates observes that "music and other discourses do not simply reflect a social reality that exists immutably on the outside; rather social reality itself is constituted within such discursive practices" (1982:21). Women in calypso can use their discourses to contribute to transformational practices that can ultimately lead to their liberation and that of others from patriarchal domination. The final paradox can perhaps be seen in the words of the Caribbean poetess Elean Thomas who writes of the Caribbean woman:

*i am no muse*
*no scholar*
*no wise one*
*no poet*
*i cannot*
*turn a rhyme*
*a metre*
  *a phrase*
*i am but one*
*of tens of millions of*
*ordinary and common persons*

*THE COMMON WOMAN*
*YET NOT COMMON TO ALL*
*Who see and feel and live*
*THE WORLD*

These words find their counter-point in those of a calypso composed and sung by one of the narrators a few weeks ago:

*Sometimes I feel so proud as a woman*
*Cause we are the mothers of every nation*
*We take time to pattern our children*
*Look how many are single parents*
*We must give our kids self confidence*
*Never cause them to be frustrated*
*For the very hands that rock the cradle*
*Are the hands that rule and control the world.*

Notes

1. The Women in the Caribbean Project (WICP) sought to look at the lives of Caribbean women in selected countries in a comprehensive manner, However, numerous efforts have been undertaken and are still ongoing at the national level by governments and non-governmental organizations, and at the Regional level under the aegis of agencies and institutions including the University of the West Indies, the University of Guyana, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat and Caribbean women's organizations.

2. Introduction to the World Plan of Action, United Nations International Women's Year Conference, Mexico City, July, 1995.

3. Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. Copenhagen, 14-30 July, 1980.

4. Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-16 July, 1985.

5. Margaret Mead uses this definition in her book Male and Female, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1949. p.301.

6. For an elaboration of this, see Massiah(1986) in her foreword to Women in the Caribbean (Part 2). Social and Economic Studies, 35(3).

7. All the countries are members of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Three of them, Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago are considered More Developed Countries (MDCs), while the other three are referred to as Less Developed Countries (LDCs).

8. Much of this information is presented in the Report on the Access, Quality and Efficiency in Education in the Caribbean, prepared by the World Bank in 1993.

9. Personal conversation with researcher, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 15 July, 1992.

10. Ibid.

11. Historians note that *Jamet* (also and more frequently *Jamette*) is derived from the French word *diametre*. It means an underworld type, one beneath the "diameter" of social respectability. For more on this, see Brereton 1981; Rohlehr 1990.

12. Constance describes Chutney as the music and song (and now dance) composed and sung by East Indian women originally behind closed doors and now in the competitive arena for male and female. It is imbued with a soul and calypso rhythm.

13. Despite its global title, most of the contestants in this competition are women from the Caribbean. Some of the women who were interviewed for this study had been contestants in this show, on various occasions. Appearance is by invitation which is extended to reigning national calypso queens or female calypsonians who have a attained a high standard of performance.

14. Carifesta, the Caribbean Festival of Arts, was first launched in 1972 as an attempt to expose the peoples of the Region to each other's culture creative activity.

15. The decision of some members of the orthodox Hindu community in Trinidad and Tobago to retain the services of a psychologist to determine the flaw in Renata's character which has led her to embark on a career in calypso, has been met with a loud outcry from some member of the public. They denounce the implied rejection of the attempt to bridge the gap between the Indian and Creole culture.

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# Appendix 1

Supplemental Interview Questions

1. What motivated you to become a calypso singer?
2. Is calypso singing your main occupation?
3. How long have you been singing?
4. Are you the only member of your family who is a calypso singer?
5. Did your family support your decision to become a calypso singer?
6. How did they show their support?
7. Have you entered any competitions?
8. Have you won any prizes?
9. When and where do you perform?
10. Do you compose your calypsos?
11. What are the topics about which you sing?
12. What influences your choices?
13. Have you made any recordings?
14. Do you have any musical training?
15. How would you describe your singing style?
16. Do you have a manager?
17. Do you sing in a calypso tent?
18. What is the ration of men to women in the tent?
19. What are some of the experiences you have had in the tent?
20. How would you react to the concept of an all-female tent?

21. Have you travelled on any overseas tours?
22. Have you faced any problems as a calypso singer? If so, what are they?
23. Has calypso singing been financially rewarding for you?
24. If you had to choose again, would you still choose to be a calypso singer?
25 What advice would you give to women who would like to enter the genre?
26. What relationship do you have with other calypsonians - male and female?
27. Have you ever been criticized for singing calypso? If so, what was the nature of the criticism and how did you deal with it?
28. As a calypsonian do you see yourself playing a specific role?
29. How do you see your future in calypso?
30. Are there any other experiences that you would like to share?

# Appendix 11

## Profiles of the Research Sites

## Guyana

### Physical Environment

Named by the Amerindians as "The Land of Many Waters", Guyana is a country of dense forests and mighty rivers, mountains and savannahs. The country has an area of 83,000 square miles, most of which is at an elevation of under 700 feet and ecologically speaking, the country can be divided into four major zones: (1) the mountain region, deep in the hinterland, whose ranges are the source for many rivers which are renowned for their waterfalls; (2) the belt of grassy plateaus or savannahs which is utilized primarily for cattle rearing; (3) the equatorial rain forest which contains Guyana's consequential timber and mineral resources. It is an area of enormous economic potential; (4) the coastal region, composed mainly of clay, which constitutes about four percent of the total land area of the country. Physiographically, this zone comprises a low-lying area which is approximately five to eight feet below sea level at low tide.

### History

Guyana, formerly British Guiana, and known officially as the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, is located on the Atlantic coast of South America. The country was originally inhabited by the Amerindians, but in the 15th century, European adventurers started to pour into the area, fuelled by stories of untold wealth and the mythical city of gold called El Dorado. The first serious European settlers were the

Dutch who in 1621 set up the Dutch West India Company with the primary objective of trading between the New World and Holland. During this period the country was administered as three separate colonies of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice.

These early trading efforts of the Dutch were mainly with the Amerindians who exchanged cotton, dyes and wood for European trinkets. When the Dutch moved into plantation agriculture and the labour-intensive cultivation of sugar cane, they resorted to the importation of labour and slaves were brought in large numbers from Africa.

In the latter half of the 18th century, as a result of wars between the European powers, the colonies were briefly in the hands of the French and the British before being returned to the Dutch. However, in 1803, the colonies were seized by Great Britain and united as a single colony in 1831, which remained in British hands until the granting of independence in 1966.

Demography

In relation to its size, Guyana's population is relatively sparse, being only 750,000 in number. The density distribution is approximately nine persons per square mile, and most of the inhabitants are concentrated along the narrow coastal plain. Guyana's population is a young one with 33.4 per cent of the population being under 15 years and another 33.2 per cent between 16 and 30 years of age. There is a slightly higher percentage of women than men. In terms of distribution, the population can be considered as predominantly rural as 65.5 per cent live in the rural areas.

The ethnic composition of the country reflects its colonial history and Guyana's people, nearly all English speaking, are as mixed as any Caribbean population and are mainly of African and East Indian descent. The mixed or mulatto population constitutes the third largest group and the Amerindians, Chinese and European follow in that order. Most of the country's population is Christian, of which Protestants, including Anglicans, predominate. Hinduism is the major non-Christian religion.

Economy

Guyana may be described as a small nation with an economy that is mainly non-industrialized and until fairly recently, not very diversified. Agriculture, including fishing, is the main economic activity, although in recent times the discovery of substantial gold deposits has led to an intensification of activity in that area of mining. In spite of its geographic location, Guyana has very little trading links with its South American neighbours. As a founding member of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), it imports and exports products to its Caribbean neighbours, but its major export destinations are the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. Although there are more females than males in the population, the former make up only 29.9 per cent of the economically active population.

## Trinidad and Tobago

### Physical Environment

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island state comprising Trinidad, which is the most southerly of the Caribbean islands and its sister island Tobago, which lies 21 miles away to the north-east. The country has a system of forested mountain ranges and plains: the Northern, Central and Southern Ranges whose names bespeak their position in relation to the points of the compass, and the Caroni, Naparaima and Nariva Plains.

The island of Tobago displays few physiographic similarities to Trinidad and consists of forested mountains which run from the north-east tip south-westwards for about two-thirds of the length of the island and a series of flat coral terraces located in the south-west.

### History

The earliest inhabitants of Trinidad were the Amerindians, mostly of the Arawak and Carib tribes. The arrival of Columbus in 1498 marked the first arrival of Europeans and paved the way for the formal colonization of the country by the Spanish in the latter half of the 15th century. Yet as Brereton notes "for nearly two centuries, the island was an insignificant part of a vast empire, an outpost of Spanish colonialism" (1981:2). As a consequence, the number of Spanish settlers was not overwhelming and in an effort to push the economic development of the island, the Spanish government encouraged French settlers from the French Caribbean islands through a formal Cedula of Population enacted in 1783. The arrival of these settlers,

mainly plantation owners and their slaves, ensured the take off of a plantation economy with sugar, cocoa and cotton as the main crops.

The capture of the island by the British in 1797 and the formal capitulation by the Spanish government three years later, meant that formally a British administration was in place, but the society maintained elements of the Spanish and French structures for a long time. In 1889, the administration of Trinidad was merged with that of Tobago and the twin island state remained under British rule until its independence in 1962.

Demography

The total land mass of 1,980 square miles supports a population of approximately 1,261,300 with a density distribution of 638.8 persons per square mile. The forested mountain areas are the most sparsely settled and most of the population is concentrated along the foot of the Northern Range. The population of Trinidad is more mixed than that of Guyana and indeed it might be the most mixed of all the Caribbean islands, in the sense that apart from the descendants of the early Europeans and Africans, there are descendants of settlers from many different countries and these include Portuguese, Chinese, Syrians and Jews. Unlike the position in Guyana, there is very little evidence of the original Amerindian inhabitants. The ethnic distribution statistics show that the East Indian and Negro population is fairly evenly distributed, and as is the case in Guyana, these two racial groups are settled in different areas, with only a small proportion of the East Indians living in the urban areas.

One of the direct consequences of the early Spanish and French influences was that the dominant religion became Roman Catholicism, a situation which has remained unchanged even after the country was taken over by the British. Hinduism is the second largest religion.

The population is a youthful one with approximately 58 per cent being under 30 years of age and the males having a very slight advantage in terms of sex distribution. At the same time, females make up 34 per cent of the economically active population.

Economy

In the nineteenth century, Trinidad's economy was overwhelmingly agricultural, with the bulk of exported sugar and cocoa accounting for the greater proportion of the colony's revenues and employing most of its labour force, but in the present century, oil has increasingly dominated the economy. The development of the oil industry has made Trinidad and Tobago relatively prosperous, and today, petroleum products, natural gas, and agriculture, primarily sugar cane, are the mainstay of the Trinidad and Tobago economy.

## Barbados

Physical Environment

Barbados, with an area of 166 square miles, lies outside the main chain of Caribbean islands, a hundred miles to the east. The island has gentle, rolling hills, white beaches and protective reefs. It is composed mainly of coral and limestone and

its highest elevated point, Mount Hillaby, near the centre of the island, rises to just over a thousand feet.

History

Unlike Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, and indeed the other Commonwealth Caribbean countries, Barbados was under the rule of only one European power - England - from the 15th century when it was colonized to the achievement of its independence in 1966. That legacy has contributed enough to Barbadian ways to earn the country the soubriquet "Little England". Not surprisingly, the island had first been occupied by the Arawak and Carib Indians and the first Europeans to sight it were the Portuguese who called it Isla de los Barbados, after the "bearded" fig trees which grew in abundance on the island. The island was never claimed by Portugal and when the first Englishmen landed on the island in 1625 and claimed it in the name of King James, the Indians too had disappeared. Returning two years later as colonists, the newcomers settled into a life of agriculture, planting mainly tobacco and branching off into sugarcane, when this became more economical to grow. Indeed, these early planters were the first in the Caribbean to establish large sugar plantations. Sugar meant slaves and these were imported by the thousands. The significance of this importation is pointed out by Tree who notes that in 1645 the Negro population was estimated at 5,680, but by 1667 it had risen to over 40,000. Barbados has the third oldest parliamentary system in the Commonwealth and the country was granted its independence from Britain in 1966.

Demography

With a population of 255,000 and an area of 166 square miles, Barbados is one of the most densely populated territories in the Caribbean with a density distribution of 1,650 persons per square mile. The freeing of slaves after the passing of the Emancipation Act did not result in a rush to import indentured labour to Barbados and this is evident in the ethnic mix of the island which is 80 per cent black, 16 per cent mixed and 4 per cent white.

The majority of the inhabitants live in the rural areas, where they are engaged in agricultural pursuits. Reflecting the general trend in the other Caribbean territories, the age distribution of the population is tilted in favour of the young, and just over one half of the population is under 30 years of age.

Economy

The economy of Barbados was based on an almost pure sugar plantation economy in both the pre- and post-emancipation eras. Sugarcane cultivation occupies nearly one half of the arable land and is the main agricultural crop. For a long time the Barbadian working mass remained tied to the estate economy and were denied by reason of geography, the escape to the mountains or the back lands as had occurred in some of the other territories, for example Jamaica, during the post-emancipation. Yet today, ironically, it is those same physical characteristics that have contributed to the success of tourism which is now one of the major industries of Barbados.

Appendix 111

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

I,.....,understand that this study, "**WOMEN IN CALYPSO: HEARING THE VOICES**" is being conducted by Carole Bishop, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, with the full concurrence of her supervisor at that institution.

I understand that the study is to investigate the experiences of female calypso singers and that the study will be of significance to women and development in the Caribbean.

I understand that I may contact the researcher with questions concerning the study and that I may withdraw from the said study at any time without prejudice.

I understand that there will be no release of my identity and that there will be no change in the research design and purpose of the study as outlined to me, unless I give further consent to this.

I understand that if I have any concerns or questions, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor, Dr M. Assheton-Smith, at the Department of Educational Foundational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta and that the cost of such communication will be borne by the researcher.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form and a copy of the **Withdrawal from Study Form.**

.....
(signature of respondent)

.....
(date)

Appendix 1V

## WITHDRAWAL FROM STUDY FORM

I,.....wish to withdraw from the study entitled "**Women in Calypso: Hearing the Voices**" which is being conducted by Carole Bishop, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. It is my understanding that I may withdraw from the study without prejudice.

.....
(signature of respondent)

.....
(date)

# Appendix V

Map of the Caribbean Area with the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean shaded in black.

Appendix V1

Scenes from 1993 Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. Photographs taken by researcher.